

# CITY OF COMMERCE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT



December 2009

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## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Community Assessment is to present a factual and conceptual foundation upon which the Community Agenda (the plan portion of the comprehensive plan) is built. The Community Assessment must consist of the following key components:

- Analysis of Existing Development Patterns (chapter 1)
- Analysis of Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) (chapter 2)
- Areas Requiring Special Attention (chapter 3)
- Recommended Character Areas (chapter 4)
- Identification of Potential Issues and Opportunities (chapter 5)
- Supporting Analysis of Data and Information (see technical appendix)

Local planning requirements of the state emphasize that the community assessment report should present information and results in a “concise, easily understood format, such as an executive summary, for consideration by the public and decision-makers involved in subsequent development of the Community Agenda.”

The community assessment consists of two major documents, this assessment document, and a technical appendix which comprises the “supporting analysis of data and information.” This community assessment document presents major trends, but there are references here to the technical appendix, where further information and analysis is provided.

## CHAPTER 1 DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND LAND USE

Commerce is located south of and along Interstate 85 in Jackson County, near the Banks County line and relatively close to Madison County. It is an established, older community that has public water and sanitary sewer service to much of it. Though it is not the county seat for Jackson County, the city remains the commercial engine of Jackson County, with the largest concentration of commercial and industrial employers of any city in Jackson County.

### EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

#### The Downtown Core

The center of Commerce is its authentic downtown, which is only a few miles south of Interstate 85 from its interchanges at SR 98 (Maysville Road) and U.S. Highway 441 (the “Banks Crossing” interchange). Commerce’s central core is primarily retail and service businesses, but also contains important civic-institutional uses such as city hall, post office, library, civic center, and cultural center. A railroad runs through the central core and beyond, giving the city many characteristics shared by other railroad towns, such as a parallel road system alongside the railroad tracks, at grade railroad crossings, and businesses and homes fronting the railroad and parallel road system. The downtown core is clearly identifiable in terms of building placement and coverage, with buildings that have no setback from the roads, high building coverages in terms of their lots, and little if any on-site parking. The downtown commercial core is compact.



Historic (Sanborn) Map of  
Commerce's Downtown Core

#### Greater Downtown Area

Still considered downtown, but with less compact development characteristics, is an area referred to in the character areas narrative as “Greater Downtown.” In this area, which surrounds the downtown core, there are mostly commercial land uses but also a mixture of residential and institutional uses. There are some industries still in the greater downtown area, but a few prior industrial sites have been adaptively reused (e.g., the civic center was an old mill site) for other uses, and there is some significant potential for further conversion of old industrial sites to uses more in keeping with the city’s aspirations for a growing downtown place. Greater downtown is transitional in nature, and there is much potential for the downtown core to grow into this transitional area, with concerted effort and economic development incentives. This area has good access from a pedestrian standpoint, but more improvements are needed. Many of the businesses in this area are considered to be more automobile-oriented, such as strip shopping centers and auto-related businesses like tire shops.



## Commercial Corridors

SR 98 (Maysville Road) connects Interstate 85 and U.S. 441 Business and eventually connects with U.S. Highway 441 (Commerce Bypass). Though there is still much vacant land along Maysville Road (SR 98) between I-85 and Woods Bridge Road, it has a clear, auto-oriented character. Not all of the properties along this part of the corridor have been annexed into Commerce. This segment of SR 98 is an important entryway into downtown Commerce, yet it presents a drastically different (auto-oriented) character than that exhibited in the city's downtown.



**Junked Vehicles are clearly visible along Maysville Road (SR 98)**



**Aerial View of Maysville Road Corridor from Interstate 85 to Greater Downtown**

There is some transition of character from auto- and truck-oriented commercial and industrial land uses to mixtures of land uses along Maysville Road (SR 98), approaching the greater downtown area. Past the Quality Foods Shopping Center, going toward downtown, there is an intact section of residential homes fronting the highway. These areas are likely to be transitional in nature in the future; Commerce might anticipate requests to convert homes to commercial and office land uses along this part of the corridor. It is within this section of Maysville Road (SR 98) where Commerce will likely face many land use decisions about appropriate transitions during the planning horizon. There are also opportunities in these areas to continue a multi-use character.

U.S. Highway 441 is a major corridor through Commerce. It used to run through Commerce along Homer Road, though the downtown. However, upon completion of the U.S. Highway 441 Bypass around the east side of Commerce, the old route was redesignated as U.S. Highway 441 Business Route. Highway-oriented commercial uses exist along U.S. Highway 441 Business at its intersection with SR 15 Alt. and SR 98.



**Walgreen's Drug Store at the intersection of Homer Road (U.S. Highway 441 Bus. and Maysville Road (SR 98)/SR 15 Alt.**

Presently, most of the properties fronting on U.S. Highway 441 (Commerce Bypass) are undeveloped. There are a few exceptions in that there are commercial uses at a few corners on intersecting highways. There is a concentration of commercial uses, including a major food store, at the intersection of U.S. Highway 441 and U.S. Highway 441 Bus./ SR 334. Also, there is a clear trend toward commercialization of the U.S. Highway 441 corridor southward from the Banks Crossing area – that part of U.S. 441 includes newer, highway-oriented commercial development.



**Commercial uses will spread southeast from the currently developed Banks Crossing area in Banks County along U.S. Highway 441 into Jackson County, a trend already evident.**

### **Neighborhood Retail Uses**

Generally, Commerce does not have a pattern of dispersed, neighborhood-oriented commercial retail development. Instead, commercial uses are concentrated in the downtown, greater downtown, and along highways in the aforementioned commercial corridors. However, midway along Homer Road is a collection of small, mostly neighborhood-serving commercial uses. Commerce also has a few commercial uses that intrude into residential neighborhoods (listed as an issue in the “issues and opportunities” chapter of this summary report).



**Opportunity to revitalize an obsolete commercial property along Homer Road (U.S. Highway 441 Bus.) for neighborhood commercial**



## Industry

The largest concentration of existing industrial land use exists within an industrial park and adjacent industrial area north of SR 98 (Maysville Road) east of Interstate 85, and northwest of the downtown area (pictured right). There are also some industrial uses along Maysville Road (SR 98) (pictured below left). There is also one large industrial property within the greater downtown area and an old mill industrial property south of the downtown core (pictured below right). More industrial development will occur in recently annexed areas along I-85 and Steve Reynolds Industrial Boulevard.



**Existing Industry in Commerce**



**Trucking Industry along Maysville Road (SR 98)**



**Old Mill Building Now Used for Furniture Storage**

## Institutional Campuses

Commerce has its own public school system. As such, it has planned its schools on central campuses. The primary campus is in the south-central part of Commerce, amidst low-density single-family residential subdivisions (see new school addition there, pictured right). A new middle school has been constructed well outside the urban area, along SR 15 Alt.



**New City School Under Construction, 2009**

### **Medical Zone**

The BJC medical center is located in north-central Commerce along Hospital Road. While much of the surrounding area is residential in use, there is a growing collection of offices and light commercial uses to the east of the hospital campus. Most of the offices surrounding the hospital are small-scale in character, and therefore, not out of context with the surrounding residential areas.



**Small-scale office development in close proximity to BJC Medical Center**

### **Traditional Neighborhoods**

Just outside, and transitioning into, the greater downtown area are Commerce's in-town residential neighborhoods which exhibit virtually all the characteristics of traditional neighborhood development (also known as neotraditional development), such as small blocks and a grid-like pattern of streets. The traditional neighborhoods generally line north and south of the downtown core and greater downtown area. Houses are generally smaller than found elsewhere in the city, since these neighborhoods before a trend appeared that favored larger and larger homes.



**Street view of neighborhood due south of downtown Commerce**

### **Suburban Neighborhoods**

Commerce's primary suburban neighborhoods are located in the southern and southwestern parts of the city, as well as north of the downtown. These areas are not extensive in nature, and some are close enough to be within walking distance of commercial areas. Generally, the suburban residential areas of Commerce lie further out from the traditional neighborhoods which surround the greater downtown area. Single-family residential zoning districts preserve these areas as single-function (residential) neighborhoods.



**Suburban residential area of Commerce**

### **Multi-Family Residential Complexes**

Commerce has some significant areas of apartments and multi-family complexes, most notably west of Waterworks Road in south-central Commerce, which includes an older public housing complex (Willoughby Homes) and a more modern apartment complex north of Minish Drive. Apartments and townhouse complexes also exist in other locations, such as just outside the city limits along B. Wilson Road. A newer (gated) apartment complex has been constructed along Steve Reynolds Industrial Boulevard.



**Jackson Hills Apartments, along B. Wilson Road, just outside the city limits of Commerce**

### **Manufactured Home Communities**

Commerce also has a variety of manufactured home communities. These range from very low density manufactured home areas along Old Harden Orchard Road to manufactured home parks along U.S. Highway 441 Business (Homer Road).

### **Agricultural and Rural Lands**

Commerce has a number of vacant and/or agricultural lands within the city limits. Many of these are large properties under the county's conservation use assessment program, along U.S. Highway 441. Also, some of the land that has been annexed along the Interstate 85 corridor still remains in agricultural use.

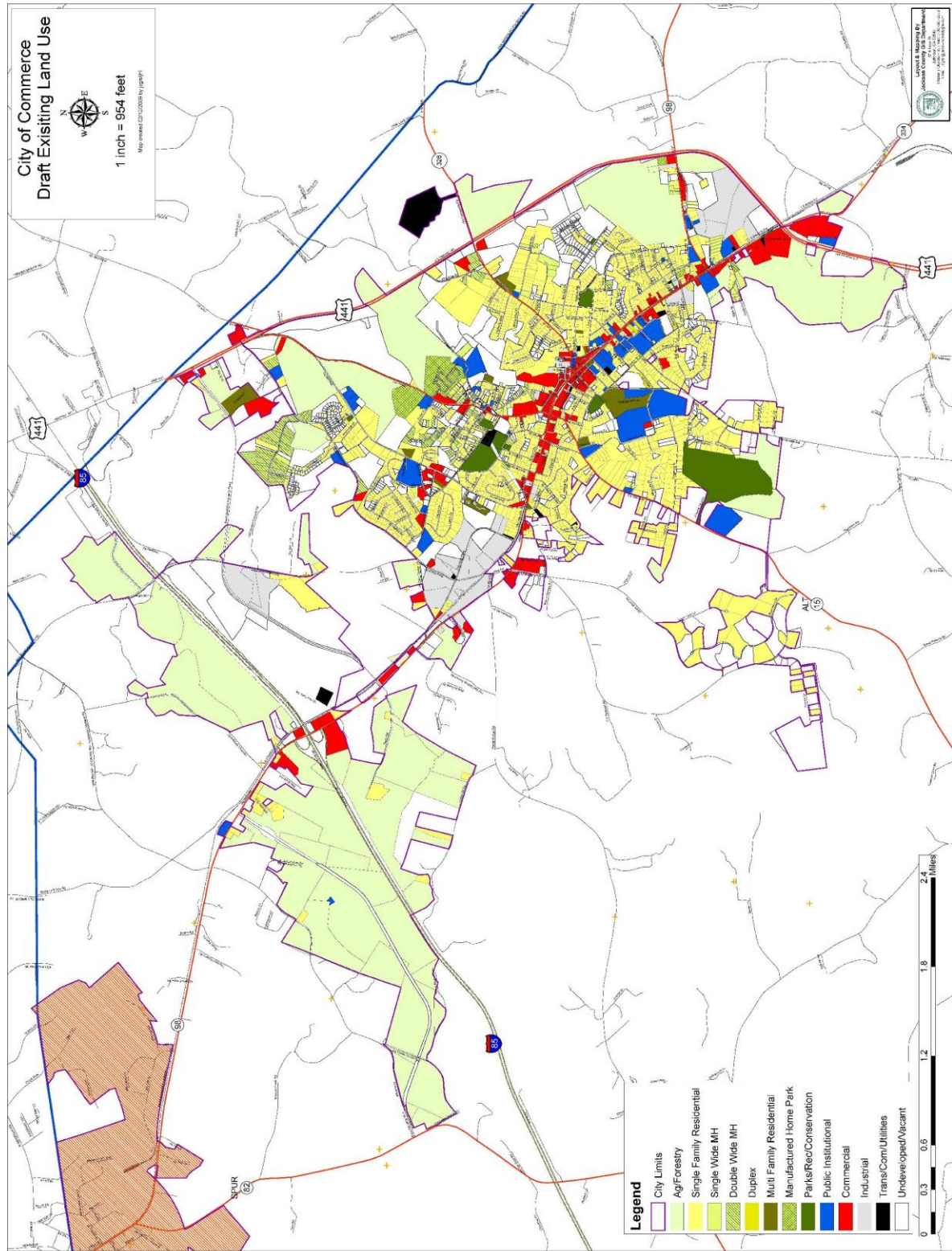
### **Interstate 85 Corridor**

Commerce has annexed to and alongside I-85, north and south of the SR 98 interchange. Much of the land in the I-85 corridor is yet to be developed. At the southeast quadrant of the I-85 and SR 98 interchange, there is commercial development (gas stations, truck stop) at the interchange but a large agricultural reserve. There are some scattered, commercial uses west of I-85 along SR 98, but most of that land is vacant. It is zoned for commercial and industrial development. North of SR 98, on the west side of Interstate 85, there is more vacant land that is zoned for industrial development, and as this area approaches the Tanger Outlet Mall area, it is zoned for commercial development.

### **EXISTING LAND USE**

A set of maps and regulatory provisions establish the overall framework for land use policy and regulation in the City of Commerce. It is important that the citizens and developers understand clearly the role that each component plays in the city's land use framework.





## Existing Land Use Map

The existing land use map is descriptive only; it shows how land is used inside the city limits. It does not in itself suggest policy or regulate land. It is used to inform character area delineation and land use planning efforts.

## Existing Land Use Categories

The following categories of existing land use are utilized in the map of existing land use for the City of Commerce:

- **Agricultural/Forestry:** Properties that are classified as farms, agricultural lands, and forestry. On occasion these areas have single-family residential dwellings on the lands so classified.
- **Single-Family Residential:** Single-family dwelling units on individual lots. This category is further sub-categorized into site-built homes, single-wide manufactured homes, and double-wide (two section) manufactured homes, all on individual lots.
- **Duplexes:** Two-family dwellings.
- **Multi-Family Residential:** Residential buildings containing two or more dwelling units, such as duplexes, triplexes, townhouses and apartments.
- **Manufactured Home Park:** Manufactured homes arranged on a single-parcel of land, with dedicated spaces (but not fee-simple lots) for the dwelling units.
- **Commercial:** Land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service and entertainment facilities.
- **Industrial:** Land dedicated to manufacturing facilities, processing plants, factories, warehousing and wholesale trade facilities, mining or mineral extraction activities, and other similar uses.
- **Public/Institutional:** State, federal or local government uses, and institutional land uses. Government uses include city halls, police and fire stations, libraries, prisons, post offices, schools, military installations, etc. Institutional uses include schools, colleges, churches, cemeteries, hospitals, etc.
- **Park/Recreation/Conservation:** Land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These lands may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, wildlife management areas, national forests, golf courses, recreation centers, or similar uses.
- **Transportation/Communication/Utilities:** Uses such as sewage treatment plants, cell towers, and utility substations.
- **Undeveloped/Vacant:** Non-agricultural tracts that have no established building or use.

## Summary of Land Use Acreages

Table 1 provides the acreage of land within each existing land use category as of 2009. More than one-third of the total land area in Commerce (2,548 acres, or 36.7 percent) is classified as agriculture and forestry. The vast majority of the agricultural and forestry lands in Commerce are located within the area Commerce annexed along the Interstate 85 corridor. However, there are also some significant, large agricultural tracts near U.S. Highway 441, as well as along Homer Road (U.S. Highway 441 Bus.) along both sides of Hospital Drive.

Single-family residential lands comprise approximately one-fourth of the total land area in Commerce as of 2009, or 1,728 acres. Less than 200 acres of that land is used for single-wide or double-wide manufactured homes. Commerce has about an equal amount of land devoted to multi-family residential uses and manufactured home parks (57 acres each).

The vast majority of commercial land uses are located along a linear pattern along SR 98 and U.S. Highway 441 Business to U.S. 441. Commercial lands comprise 4.1 percent of the city's total land area (283 acres). About an equal amount of land in Commerce is devoted to industrial uses (270 acres, 3.9 percent). Public-institutional uses comprise 3 percent of the city's land area. There are 141 acres classified as park/recreation/conservation, comprising 2 percent of the city's land area. More than one-fifth (22.8 percent, or 1,578 acres) of the land is classified as vacant/undeveloped.

**Table 1**  
**Existing Land Use, 2009**  
**City of Commerce**

<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Agriculture and Forestry	2,539.8	36.7
Single-family residential total	1,727.9	25.0
--Single-family residential, site built	1,540.6	--
--Manufactured home, single-wide	53.9	--
--Manufactured home, double-wide	133.4	--
Multi-family residential total	120.0	1.7
--Two-family residential (duplex)	5.0	--
--Multi-family residential	57.3	--
--Manufactured home park	57.7	--
Public/Institutional	206.0	3.0
Commercial	283.4	4.1
Industrial	270.0	3.9
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	55.4	0.8
Park/Recreation/Conservation	141.1	2.0
Undeveloped/Vacant	1,577.5	22.8
All Land Uses Calculated	6,921.1	100%

Note: The total for all land uses calculated is less than total city limits area because public right of ways are excluded.  
Source: Jackson County GIS, August 2009.



## **CHAPTER 2 ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (QCOs)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Requirements**

In 1999 the Board of the Department of Community Affairs adopted the Quality Community Objectives (QCOs) as a statement of the development patterns and options that will help Georgia preserve its unique cultural, natural and historic resources while looking to the future and developing to its fullest potential. The QCOs are articulated in Chapter 110-12-1-.06 of the Local Planning Requirements (Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs).

#### **At a Glance: Quality Community Objectives (QCOs)**

- **Growth Preparedness**
- **Appropriate Business**
- **Employment Options**
- **Educational Opportunities**
- **Heritage Preservation**
- **Environmental Protection**
- **Open Space**
- **Transportation Alternatives**
- **Housing Opportunities**
- **Traditional Neighborhoods**
- **Infill Development**
- **Sense of Place**
- **Regional (3): Identity, Cooperation, Solutions**

The community assessment portion of the comprehensive plan is required to include an assessment of the community's current policies, activities, and development patterns for consistency with the QCOs (see Chapter 110-12-1.03 of DCA Rules, "Local Planning Requirements").

#### **Assessment Tools and Techniques**

The Office of Planning and Quality Growth has created an assessment tool meant to give communities an idea of how it is progressing toward reaching these objectives set by the Department. The assessment is much like a demographic analysis or a land use map, showing a community that "you are here." That assessment tool provides a checklist format, with yes or no answers and a column in the table for elaboration and explanation. That assessment tool is heavily consulted here, but the checklist format is not used.

#### **Prior QCO Assessment (2007)**

In July 2007, the City of Commerce prepared a "Partial Plan Update" which included a preliminary assessment of the city's consistency with QCOs. This assessment draws on that prior work but includes more detailed information based on additional research, particularly the information presented in the technical appendix of this Community Assessment.

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**“Environmental Protection Objective:** Air quality and environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from negative impacts of development. Environmentally sensitive areas deserve special protection, particularly when they are important for maintaining traditional character or quality of life of the community or region. Whenever possible, the natural terrain, drainage, and vegetation of an area should be preserved.”

### Summary

Commerce and Jackson County lie outside the metropolitan Atlanta area which has been a non-attainment area for purposes of state and federal air quality regulations. Generally, air quality is therefore not susceptible presently to negative impacts of development. As noted in the technical appendix (Chapter 4, Natural Resources), Commerce has relatively few environmentally sensitive areas. Generally, the city has the appropriate regulations in place to ensure that its environmentally sensitive areas are protected. Therefore, Commerce’s plans and regulations are sufficiently in alignment with the environmental protection Quality Community Objective (QCO). However, there are some refinement Commerce should make to its environmental protection criteria and other environmental regulations.

### Comprehensive Natural Resources Inventory

The 1998 comprehensive plan for the county and city provided a comprehensive inventory in map format of major natural resources, including but not limited to rivers and streams, prime agricultural soils, developable soils, scenic views and sites, and environmental planning criteria areas (groundwater recharge areas, wetlands, and water supply watersheds) and others. That inventory was generally sufficient, and this community assessment carries forth (and makes certain refinements to) that prior inventory. Therefore, Commerce meets the environmental protection QCO with respect to having a comprehensive inventory of natural resources.



Refer to the Technical Appendix for detailed citywide maps of environmental and natural resources, such as the one excerpted above (soils with development limitations).

### Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance

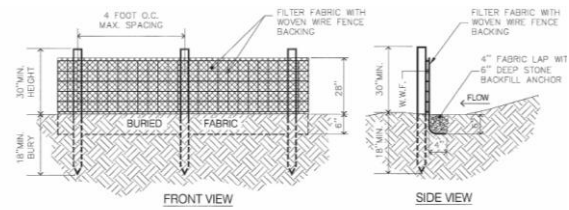
Commerce has adopted a flood damage prevention ordinance as a part of its zoning ordinance (see Chapter 3.06). Additionally, Chapter 38 of the City Code includes a flood damage prevention ordinance. The ordinance provisions follow the standard model but are in need of updating. Also, Commerce needs to reconcile to the two versions and consolidate them into one.



Flood areas are shown on FEMA maps.

## Soil Erosion Control Ordinance

Chapter 30 of the Commerce City Code includes a soil erosion and sedimentation control ordinance. Such ordinances are required to be updated whenever there are changes to the 1975 state soil erosion and sedimentation act. Presently, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources has called for local governments to update the soil erosion and sedimentation control ordinance by 2010, to reflect changes to the state's soil erosion law.



SILT FENCE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF SECTION 181—TEMPORARY SILT FENCE, OF THE GEORGIA STANDARD SPECIFICATIONS, 1983 EDITION, AND BE WIRE-REINFORCED.

**NOTES:**

1. THE SUPPORT POST SPACING IS NOT TO EXCEED 4 FEET.
2. USE STEEL POSTS ONLY.
3. USE 36" D.O.T. APPROVED FABRIC.

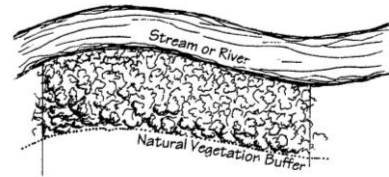


SILT FENCE WITH WWF BACKING (TYPE "C")  
N.T.S.

**Soil erosion and sediment control ordinances require installation of silt fences and other best management practices.**

## Stream Buffers and Watershed Protection

Commerce owns the Grove Creek Reservoir in Banks County. Commerce's city code establishes requirements for the Grove Creek Reservoir and the Mountain Creek Watershed, but both are located in Banks County (see Sec. 30-161 City Code).



**Illustrative Stream Buffer**

The city has also adopted reservoir management plans for the 307.4 acre Grove Creek Reservoir in Banks County (see Sec. 30-166 City Code) and the 50-acre Mountain Creek Reservoir in Banks County (Sec. 30-167 City Code). The city has adopted a stream buffer ordinance (Sec. 30-231 et seq.) which requires an undisturbed, natural vegetative buffer of 50 feet from both banks of streams, and an additional 25 foot setback, within which impervious cover is prohibited (see Sec. 30-235 City Code).

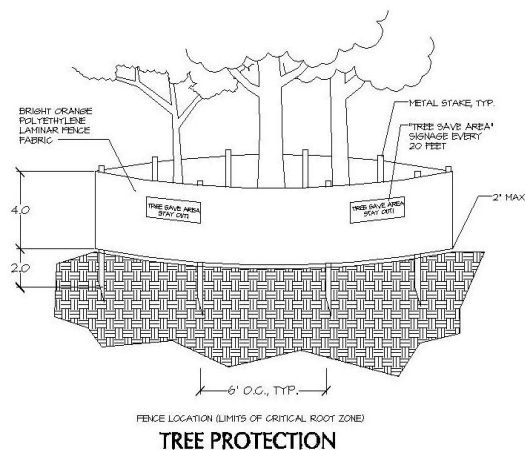
## Porous Pavements

Commerce's zoning ordinance requires, in all zoning districts, the use of porous pavement materials for driveways, parking lots, bike paths, and sidewalks except where it is not feasible for specified reasons (Chapter 4.01).

## Tree Protection

Article 12 of the city's subdivision and land development regulations specify minimum tree density requirements outside building envelopes. Per the city's zoning ordinance, trees cannot be removed from a site until a building permit has been granted (Sec. 1.04.009 zoning ordinance). Those regulations promote the preservation of islands with multiple trees and significant tree stands as opposed to the protection of individual trees throughout a given site. The zoning ordinance also defines "specimen" tree.

Tree protection zones are required to be delineated on plans. Tree fencing is required to be installed for existing trees to be protected. Trees must comprise 67 percent of the minimum plant units required in the city's landscaping ordinance (see Sec. 4.08.009(B)); thus, the ordinance requires significant planting of trees.



**Illustrative Tree Protection Requirement**

## OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

**“Open Space Preservation Objective:** New development should be designed to minimize the amount of land consumed, and open space should be set aside from development for use as public parks or as greenbelts/wildlife corridors.”

### Summary

While Commerce has a detailed open space design overlay district in place in its zoning ordinance, there is not a great deal of incentive to undertake development according to its rules. Since it is voluntary, it is applied in Commerce only to the extent that developers choose to follow the overlay district. Commerce has some park land but some of it is active recreation and therefore does not technically qualify as “open space.” Commerce’s official zoning map has several parcels that are designated as “green space.” Generally speaking, however, Commerce does not have significant green space or open space lands. As noted above, some of the lack of green space can be attributed to Commerce’s superior location, outside of significant environmentally sensitive areas. If Commerce is to embrace this quality community objective, it will need to do more by way of requiring open spaces and acquiring land for permanent protection as open space.

### Overall Density Limitations

Commerce’s zoning ordinance (see Chapter 2.02) defines development density in a way that excludes those lands that are usually considered unusable, such as poorly drained soils, steep slopes, and 100-year floodplains. In doing so, Commerce has adopted a regulation that encourages densities to be lower near environmentally sensitive areas. Designs that preserve open space are also encouraged.

### Greenspace Requirements for Subdivisions

Section 11.4 of the city’s subdivision regulations indicate that every developer shall set aside a minimum of twenty percent of the total subdivision acreage as dedicated greenspace” However, that ordinance only applies to the subdivision of land, not land development generally (See Sec. 4.1). Therefore, this provision has limited applicability. More is needed to address greenspace requirements on land that does not require subdivision.

## **Open Space Design Overlay District**

Commerce's zoning ordinance (see Chapter 3.05) establishes an OSD, Open Space Design, overlay district. Procedurally, development under this overlay district is required to obtain approval by the planning commission and city council. As such, the district is voluntary. The standards involved in this district are very much like a conservation subdivisions ordinance, in that it defines open spaces, establishes development standards (such as preserving the natural state of landscape insofar as practicable). Development under this overlay district is subjected to a rigorous, detailed review and approval procedures, and there is no additional density incentive to be gained by developers if they choose this option. The regulations do not establish a minimum lot size, but a minimum lot frontage of 75 feet is required for lots in this district. A minimum of 40 percent of the land area must be set aside as permanent open space.

The preliminary review of this zoning overlay district suggests that some of the regulatory provisions regarding what is acceptable open space may be confusing and/or overlapping. Any disincentives such as a complicated review process and rigorous standards not applicable under conventional development scenarios will prevent this district from being applied to any significant degree. Many of the standards are good environmental practices that should be applied in other zoning districts, not just through the overlay district procedure.

## **GROWTH PREPAREDNESS**

**Growth Preparedness Objective:** Each community should identify and put in place the prerequisites for the type of growth it seeks to achieve. These may include housing and infrastructure (roads, water, sewer and telecommunications) to support new growth, appropriate training of the workforce, ordinances to direct growth as desired, or leadership capable of responding to growth opportunities.”

Commerce provides a relatively wide range of housing opportunities, including smaller detached, single-family units, larger, more modern suburban subdivisions, manufactured home parks, townhouses, and apartments (see also the analysis of the housing options QCO).

As a provider of utilities, including natural gas and electricity, Commerce is planning for future demands on those utilities. Training opportunities for the workforce are considered adequate, as described more fully elsewhere in this report (see educational opportunities in this chapter). Commerce does not have any specific ordinances that direct growth, although certainly its zoning ordinance and other regulations influence the overall direction and quality of that growth. The city's elected officials and management provide leadership in terms of addressing the issues of growth, including downtown and industrial development, and the advance provision of infrastructure. Overall, the past practices of the City of Commerce are considered to be supportive of this quality community objective.

## **APPROPRIATE BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS**

**Appropriate Business Objective:** The businesses and industries encouraged to develop or expand in a community should be suitable for the community in terms of job skills required, linkages to other economic activities in the region, impact on the resources of the area, and future prospects for expansion and creation of higher-skill job opportunities.”

**“Employment Options Objective:** A range of job types should be provided in each community to meet the diverse needs of the local workforce.”

### **Summary**

The City of Commerce has a number of opportunities to expand its economic base and employment opportunities. It has industrial parks and has annexed and zoned land for future industrial development, which will provide opportunities for future “blue collar” jobs. The city has a healthy downtown which provides a mix of retail, service, finance, insurance, real estate, and other job opportunities. There is substantial opportunity to increase the retail, lodging, accommodation and food services, and other commercial business in the city. Commerce has some government jobs but it is not the county seat. Due to the variety of jobs available and tremendous potential, Commerce meets and embraces the appropriate business and employment options QCOs.

### **Jobs in Relation to Workforce Needs**

Data on employment within Commerce are limited. The data appendix reveals useful statistics with regard to evaluating the appropriate business QCO, at least with regard to Jackson County and to a lesser extent for the City of Commerce. The data appendix reveals that Jackson County has more workers than jobs in the following employment industries: educational services, construction, health care, and transportation and warehousing. Jackson County and Commerce should attract more jobs in these industries and sectors, since there are deficiencies in terms of jobs when compared with Jackson County residents working in those industries and sectors.

As of 2000, Jackson County had almost exactly the same amount of retail trade jobs as it had resident labor force participants working in that industry. Similarly, the manufacturing industry was close to optimal in 2000, in terms of the number of jobs in Jackson County and the number of Jackson County resident laborers working in manufacturing industries. This doesn't mean Commerce should not recruit businesses and manufacturers in these industries, but only that it does not have a surplus of employees in these industries that would benefit from new job creation in Jackson County and the city.

There are some industries with job surpluses in Jackson County as of 2000 when compared with Jackson County's labor force. Accommodation and food services and administrative and support and waste management services fall into a category of “more jobs available than resident workers in the county.” Food service workers and jobs in the lodging industries bring comparatively lower wages, and as such, it may be that people are available to work in these industries but elect not to work in them, in favor of higher paying jobs in other industries. Due to comparatively low pay and the observation that as of 2000 there were more jobs in these industries than workers in Jackson County, there appears to be no compelling reason to recruit establishments in those industries, at least as a formal economic development strategy.

### **Home Offices**

Home occupations are important and sometimes overlooked as a mechanism for providing convenient employment options. Home occupations are also the premier “job-housing” balancing tool. Commerce's zoning ordinance allows for home offices in all agricultural and residential zoning districts.

## **EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**“Educational Opportunities Objective:** Educational and training opportunities should be readily available in each community – to permit community residents to improve their job skills, adapt to technological advances, or to pursue entrepreneurial ambitions.”

Commerce has its own public school system, separate from Jackson County. Lanier Technical College has a satellite campus in Commerce. The University of Georgia is located within convenient commuting distance to Commerce. There are many other higher education and technical education institutions in reasonable proximity to the city. Therefore, Commerce meets this QCO.

## **HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES**

**“Housing Opportunities Objective:** Quality housing and a range of housing size, cost, and density should be provided in each community, to make it possible for all who work in the community to also live in the community.”

### **Summary**

The City of Commerce is the most inclusive area of housing in all of Jackson County. Within the city, there is the widest variety of housing options possible, including manufactured homes on individual lots, manufactured home parks, single-family detached subdivisions with wide varieties of lot sizes and characteristics, duplexes, townhouses, apartments, and housing above commercial stores in the downtown. Therefore, the City of Commerce’s housing stock meets the housing opportunities QCO. Commerce, however, does not address accessory dwelling units in its zoning code, has little if any vacant land zoned for apartments, and limits residential densities in many zoning districts to an amount that may not be feasible to develop. Therefore, there is more it can do to promote the housing opportunities QCO.

### **Modular Housing**

Modular home (industrialized building) is defined in the Commerce zoning ordinance. Such homes are allowed as a permitted use in all residential zones.

### **Manufactured Housing**

The zoning ordinance distinguishes between “Class A” and “Class B” manufactured homes. Class “A” homes must have a minimum width of 28 feet (i.e., requiring two sections or that the home be a “double wide”), have a certain roof pitch and specified roofing materials, and they must be placed on a permanent foundation with a landing installed. Class “A” manufactured homes are permitted in Agricultural-Residential (AR) zoning districts and (R4) Multi-family Residential zoning districts. Class “B” comprises all other manufactured homes that do not meet “Class A” standards, and they are permitted outright in Agricultural-Residential (AR) R-5 (manufactured home parks/subdivisions) zoning districts. Individual manufactured homes are also regulated per Chapters 4.11 and 4.12 of the Commerce zoning ordinance.



### **Manufactured Home Parks**

Commerce's zoning ordinance contains regulations for manufactured home parks (Chapter 4.25 zoning ordinance). The regulations require a minimum park size of 10 acres, a minimum lot size of 11,000 square feet, and a maximum density of 3.5 dwelling units per acre (and/or a minimum lot area per dwelling unit of 11,000 square feet).



**Manufactured Home Park in Commerce**

### **Multi-family Dwellings**

Two-family dwellings are permitted in R3 and R4 zoning districts. Commerce's R4 zoning district permits multi-family dwellings. However, that district requires a minimum lot area per dwelling unit of 10,500 square feet, meaning that densities are limited to approximately 4.1 dwelling units per acre.



**Apartment Complex in Commerce**

There will be a huge need for multi-family housing once the additional commercial and industrial acreage develops in the city. The map of preliminary character areas recognizes this need and suggests that additional multi-family development permissions be provided along U.S. Highway 441 within urban residential and mixed use designations. Commerce, which has sewer capacity available for multi-family development, should allow for significantly higher densities in those designated urban residential zones than is currently allowed by the city's zoning ordinance.

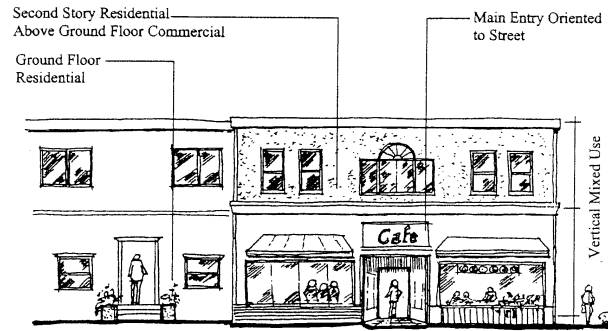


**Heritage Crossing, a gated apartment complex, has been constructed along Steve Reynolds Industrial Boulevard. It is representative of an evolving need for rental housing close to employment.**



## Mixed Commercial-Residential Uses

The zoning ordinance defines “upper floor residential apartment.” Upper floor residential apartments are permitted outright in the Central Business District (CBD) zoning district, with a maximum of four units per acre. Such uses are also subject to Chapter 4.24 of the Commerce zoning ordinance.



Illustrative Mixed Use Building

## Accessory Dwelling Units

The zoning ordinance does not define or regulate accessory dwelling units. As noted elsewhere, the potential application of accessory dwelling units is listed as an issue in this community assessment.



Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc.  
Planning & Development Consultants

A unit above a garage, added to an existing lot, is frequently termed an accessory dwelling unit.

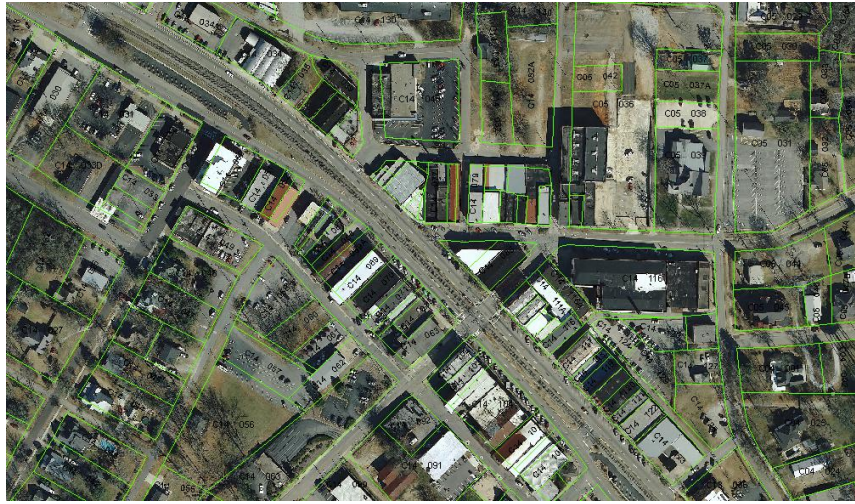
## TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOODS

**“Traditional Neighborhood Objective:** Traditional neighborhood development patterns should be encouraged, including use of more human scale development, mixing of uses within easy walking distance of one another, and facilitating pedestrian activity.”

Commerce has a true downtown which follows principles of Main Street retail character. It promotes this downtown and within it a variety of land uses are allowed. The city has done a good job of promoting its downtown and improving its character with streetscapes and public investments. Hence, with regard to the downtown, the city meets and embraces this quality community objective.



Commerce's Downtown Core



**Aerial View of Downtown Commerce, 2009**

Commerce has neighborhoods close to the downtown which meet the definition of traditional neighborhoods, given their design and closeness to downtown. The preliminary character areas presented in this summary report identify these neighborhoods and suggest that their character be nurtured and retained. Commerce does not have a traditional neighborhood development ordinance, but additional zoning provisions and traditional neighborhood development design guidelines will be called for in the city's community agenda (see also Chapter 5 of this report).



**Traditional neighborhood across skinny street from Commercial Corridor**

## **INFILL DEVELOPMENT**

**“Infill Development Objective:** Communities should maximize the use of existing infrastructure and minimize the conversion of undeveloped land at the urban periphery by encouraging development or redevelopment of sites closer to the downtown or traditional urban core of the community.”

Commerce places an appropriate emphasis on ensuring its downtown remains healthy; as such, public facilities and most municipal investments have emphasized the downtown area, consistent with this QCO. However, there are tremendous opportunities for commercial and industrial land outside of the downtown area, so this QCO has much relevance in a general context. It is clear that in the future many acres of undeveloped land at the urban periphery will be converted to commercial and industrial land uses, and to a lesser extent residential uses. In particular, the I-85 and U.S. 441 corridors are mostly “Greenfield” and therefore ripe for development. At issue is whether Commerce’s development pattern will remain relatively

compact, or whether as Greenfield development occurs the compact downtown will lose its hegemony.

In Chapter 4 of this report, there is a map of “areas requiring special attention,” which identifies several properties within Commerce that are available for residential infill development. One area that would benefit from a strategy for promoting infill development is the “Johnstown” area of Commerce, located along Homer Road. This area has some older, dilapidated homes and significant opportunities for infill development. That map demonstrates that Commerce can accommodate a significant share of its future residential dwelling needs on existing vacant lots and underdeveloped subdivisions.



## SENSE OF PLACE

**“Sense of Place Objective:** Traditional downtown areas should be maintained as the focal point of the community or, for newer areas where this is not possible, the development of activity centers that serve as community focal points should be encouraged. These community focal points should be attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly places where people choose to gather for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment.”

### Summary

Commerce’s downtown provides a definite sense of place, as it is a traditional downtown area which remains a true focal point for the community at large, as well as Jackson County as a whole. Therefore, Commerce clearly meets the spirit and intent of this QCO. Work is underway via the Downtown Development Authority and the City of Commerce generally to nurture and improve the downtown as the community focal point of the city. The downtown may not have reached its potential, however, with regard to attractiveness and being the center for shopping, dining, socializing, and entertainment. The downtown has some competition in that the Tanger Outlet mall is located closer to an interchange of Interstate 85 and therefore attracts more visitors. Commerce’s downtown can compete, however, with all other places of gathering in the city and county, particularly if the city continues to improve pedestrian access and further nurtures the unique character of downtown.





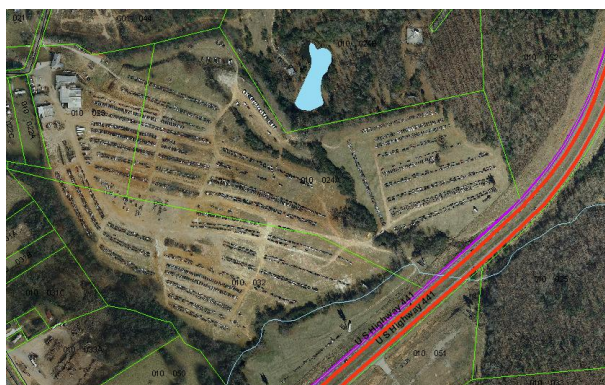
Commerce has identified its downtown with small logo signs: "A City on the Right Track."



Small gateway area into Commerce from Jefferson Street (SR 15 Alt.) contains a sign that identifies Commerce and exhibits sense of place.

As noted elsewhere in this summary report, Commerce also has some traditional neighborhoods close to downtown that further enhance the downtown area's quality of place. There are opportunities to expand the downtown central core into transitional areas between the central core and those traditional neighborhoods. Furthermore, there are significant needs with regard to connecting those traditional, in-town neighborhoods with sidewalks for pedestrian access.

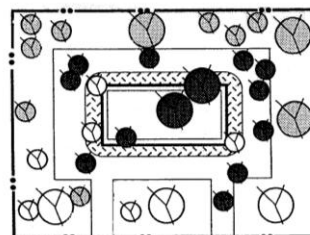
Outside of the downtown and its surrounding traditional neighborhoods, many of the city's subdivisions exhibit an attractive, inviting residential character. However, there are commercial corridors, particularly SR 98 between downtown and Interstate 85, that deserve better treatment architecturally and functionally. Furthermore, there are some junkyards located along U.S. Highway 441 which tend to detract from the character and quality of place of Commerce. These issues are highlighted in the areas of special attention (see Chapter 3 of this summary report).



Aerial view of large automobile graveyard which is partially visible from U.S. Highway 441.

### Landscaping Requirements

Chapter 4.08 of the Commerce zoning ordinance specifies requirements for landscaping. The ordinance specifies minimum plant units for residential zoning districts (60 per dwelling unit), commercial and industrial zoning districts (10 plant units for each 1,000 square feet of gross land area), and for office-institutional zoning districts (30 plant units for each 1000 square feet of gross land area).



- LEGEND**
- ⊗ Existing Tree
  - Tree to be removed
  - ⊗ Tree to be replaced

Illustrative Tree Replacement Plan

## Sign Ordinance

The Commerce zoning ordinance contains a set of sign regulations. In addition, Chapter 3 of the City Code provides regulations for outdoor advertising signs visible from the interstate highway system. It is in the interest of the city to consolidate the two sets of sign regulations, and additional provisions may be needed to improve the aesthetic appearance of commercial corridors in the city, suggesting that sign regulations should be revised as appropriate.



Sign controls can have an important bearing on the resulting aesthetic character of a place.

## Lighting Ordinance

External lighting can have an important influence on the nighttime quality of a given community. If not appropriately regulated, outdoor lighting can result in glare, light trespass, and unnecessary lighting of the nighttime sky. Outdoor lighting is regulated via Chapter 4.09 of Commerce's zoning ordinance.

## HERITAGE PRESERVATION

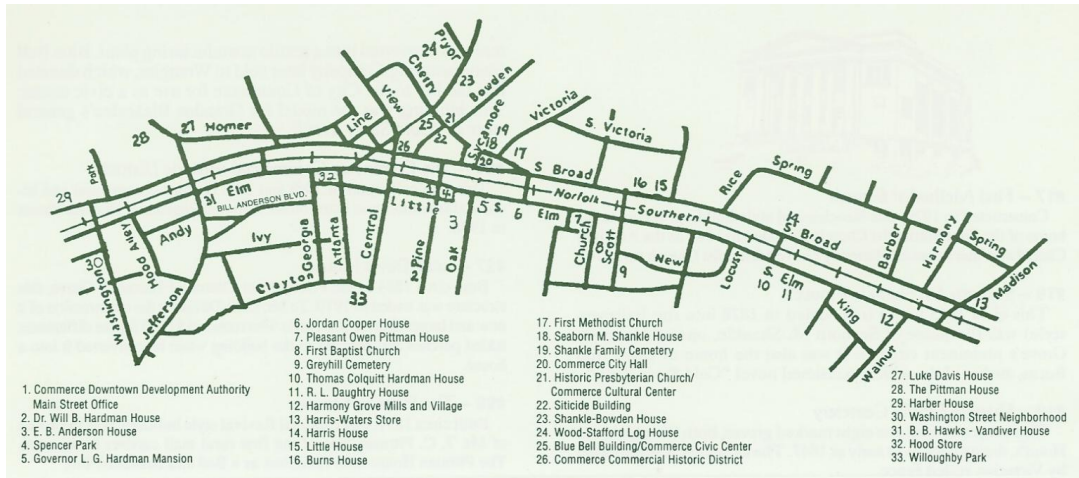
**“Heritage Preservation Objective:** The traditional character of the community should be maintained through preserving and revitalizing historic areas of the community, encouraging new development that is compatible with the traditional features of the community, and protecting other scenic or natural features that are important to defining the community's character.”

The historic areas in Commerce are one of the city's most coveted resources. The city is generally cognizant of the number of historic resources in the city, which include commercial, institutional, and residential land uses. And they even include other resources, such as the old water tower on Maysville Road (SR 98) (pictured right). There is an account of the city's history in the design guidelines for the downtown (discussed further below), and there is a walking tour brochure (excerpted below) for the downtown which highlights many of the historic resources in the downtown.



Old Water Tower on Maysville Road (SR 98)





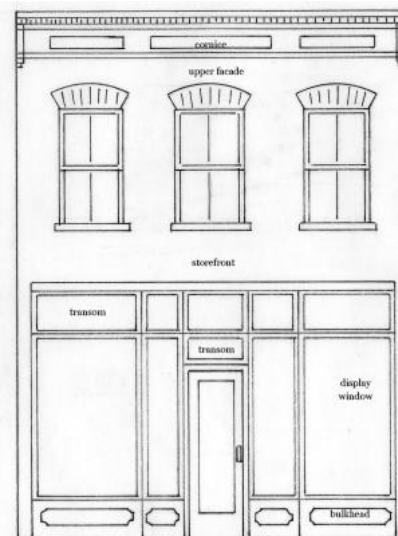
**Historic Walking Tour Map**  
**Source: City of Commerce**

The city has undertaken a number of initiatives, such as purchasing the old post office for a city hall (pictured right), renovating an old mill as the city's civic center, and providing a façade improvement program in the downtown for commercial businesses. Those noteworthy accomplishments demonstrate Commerce's significant efforts to preserve and promote its historic resources. Additionally, downtown property owners understand the importance of history to the city and are active in revitalizing their properties.



**Commerce City Hall**

In 1982 a plan for downtown Commerce was produced by the Northeast Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission. This plan, *The Commerce Central Business District Revitalization Study*, emphasized rehabilitation of downtown buildings. To facilitate economic development and preservation in the downtown area the Commerce Downtown Development Authority was formed in 1985. The Commerce Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. The *Commerce Design Review Guidelines* were originally created in 1991 to provide specific criteria for alterations, changes, construction, and demolition in the Commerce Commercial Historic District. Those guidelines were update by an architectural firm, Thomason and Associates.



**Commercial building details as illustrated in the Commerce Design Guidelines**

Despite these positive accomplishments, Commerce has underachieved when it comes to historic preservation programs. Historically, Commerce's elected leadership has chosen not to pursue a local historic preservation program to the point of regulating architecture and preventing the demolition of historic structures. Commerce has adopted a demolition ordinance, but it has not ensured the preservation of existing historic resources since it delays rather than prevents demolition of historic structures. There are three national register districts but no local preservation districts. Although the city has a voluminous inventory of historic resources (completed in 1993), that inventory is now dated, and not enough has been done to look at the potential for designating additional national register and local historic districts. There is much that can be done with regard to heritage preservation, as described more fully in the technical appendix (see Chapter 5).

## TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

**“Transportation Alternatives Objective:** Alternatives to transportation by automobile, including mass transit, bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities, should be made available. Greater use of alternative transportation should be encouraged.”

### Summary

Transportation is addressed in detail in Chapter 7 of the technical appendix. Generally, public transportation is not available in Commerce except via the county's rural public transportation services. It is unrealistic to expect that Commerce will develop mass transit, given its location and relatively low densities. Furthermore, the city has few if any opportunities for mobility via bicycles. Clearly, Commerce is auto-dependent, with Interstate 85 and U.S. Highway 441, along with several state routes through the city.

Commerce has a limited sidewalk network (an inventory is underway as a part of this comprehensive plan). There is much more that Commerce can do to be consistent with this QCO, including changes to development regulations with regard to provision of sidewalks, more public installation of sidewalks connecting traditional neighborhoods to the downtown, and some longer-range thinking and planning for bike routes and multi-use trails.



Sidewalk along part of Waterworks Road

### Sidewalk Requirements

Article 11, Sec. 11.5 of the City's subdivision regulations addresses requirements for sidewalks. However, that section does not specify the locations for which sidewalks will be provided.

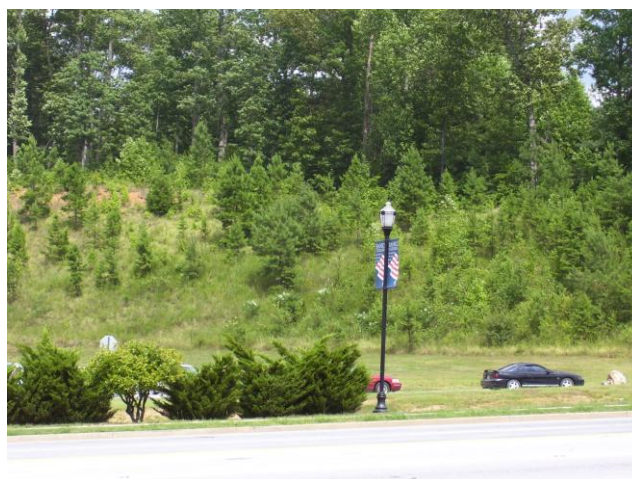
## REGIONAL QCOs

**“Regional Identity Objective:** Regions should promote and preserve an “identity,” defined in terms of traditional regional architecture, common economic linkages that bind the region together, or other shared characteristics.”

**“Regional Cooperation Objective:** Regional cooperation should be encouraged in setting priorities, identifying shared needs, and finding collaborative solutions, particularly where it is critical to success of a venture, such as protection of shared natural resources.”

**“Regional Solutions Objective:** Regional solutions to needs shared by more than one local jurisdiction are preferable to separate local approaches, particularly where this will result in greater efficiency and less cost to the taxpayer.”

Commerce identifies to a significant extent with Athens-Clarke County, and it is definitely considered “bulldog territory.” Much of Commerce is also inextricably bound together with that part of Banks County known as “Banks Crossing.” This by definition means that Commerce will need to continue cooperating with Banks County in terms of service provision; Commerce already provides sanitary sewer service to that area. Banks County is also the location of the city’s water supply. Commerce is also noted as a part of the broader region which has a number of racing venues. As noted in the issues and opportunities section of this report, there are significant opportunities for Commerce to capitalize on the interest in automobile racing in the region.



**Banks Crossing has regional identity, bolstered by the installation of some streetscape improvements.**

Commerce has worked well with Jackson County and other nearby municipalities such as Maysville, when it comes to service provision. There are many ways in which Commerce is also linked together with Maysville – again, with regard to public services, Commerce is like a “big brother” to that smaller city in terms of potential sewer service and other facility arrangements. Also, as noted in the areas requiring special attention (Chapter 4 of this report), there is a need for Commerce to coordinate with Jackson County in terms of commercial corridor regulation (especially with regard to SR 98 and U.S. Highway 441).

Chapter 5.10 of the Commerce zoning ordinance specifies a process to be followed when there is a dispute between Jackson County and Commerce with regard to annexation and land use. As the state law provisions regarding these disputes has changed over time, Commerce should reconsider this process as articulated in its zoning ordinance.

The community agenda will identify more that Commerce can do to implement these regional QCOs.



## **CHAPTER 3 AREAS REQUIRING SPECIAL ATTENTION**

Rules of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for local comprehensive plans require the local government to identify “areas requiring special attention.” The rules further describe the types of areas that should be considered and, if applicable, mapped in the community assessment summary report. This chapter is devoted to complying with that part of the state administrative rules.

It is important to underscore at the outset what is meant by the phrase, “areas requiring special attention.” A given resource or area may be important, and require regulations or some public policy action or program. For example, wetlands are clearly important, and they are mapped in the technical appendix of this report. However, if the community has already addressed them adequately in its land use regulations, they do not necessarily need to be designated as areas requiring special attention. In other words, those important regulatory issues and policy problems that have already been adequately addressed are not shown on maps in this summary report and labeled as “areas requiring special attention.”

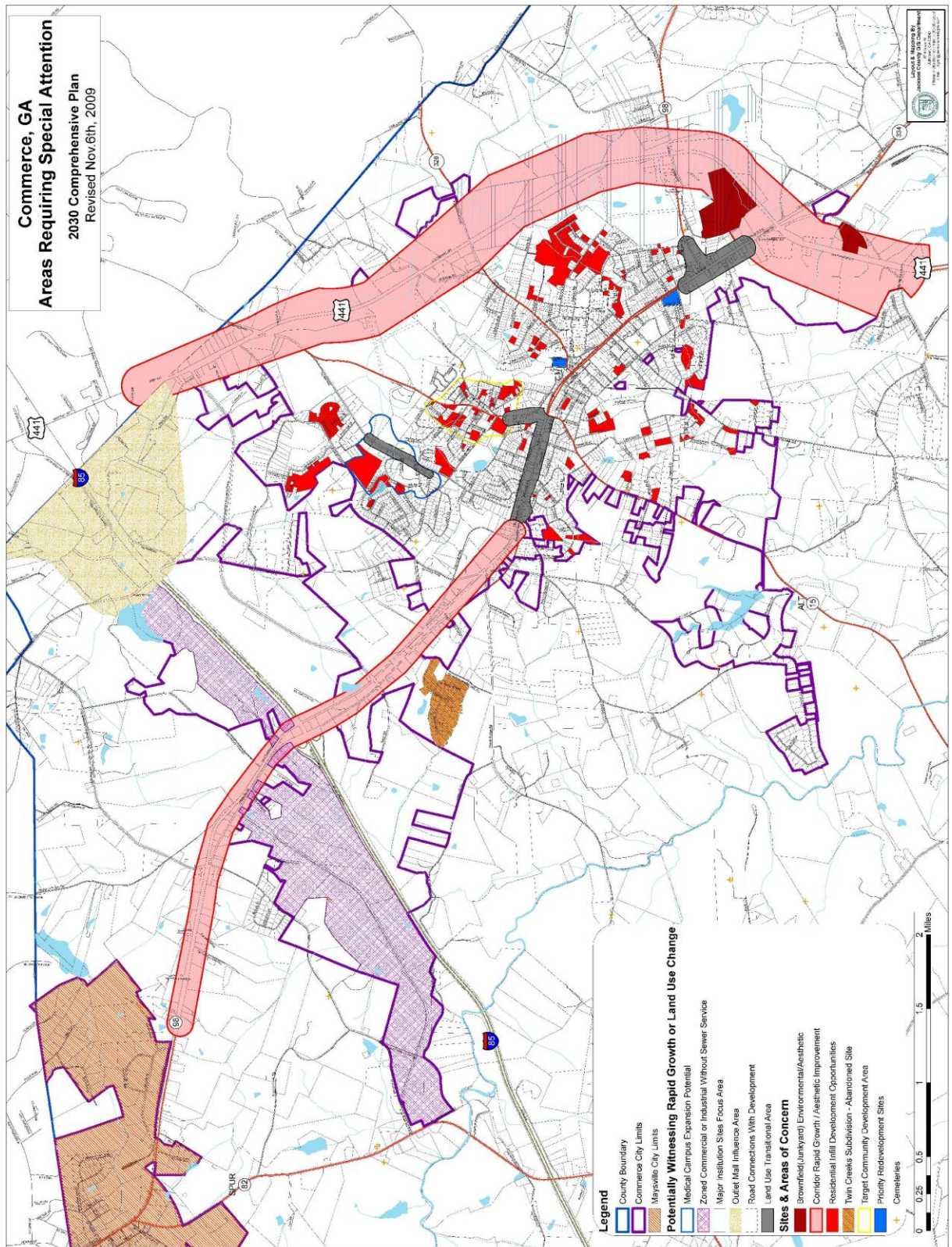
It is also important to emphasize and clarify the relative time period which is being considered, when one identifies areas requiring special attention. To suggest something needs “attention” means that it deserves consideration and action in the short-term, i.e., within the next five years, as opposed to consideration over the “long range.” Therefore, the City of Commerce’s efforts to identify areas requiring special attention are focused on those items that need to be addressed during the next five years.

### **CATEGORIZATION**

The administrative rules for local planning require that community assessments identify any areas of concern within the following general categories:

- Significant Natural or Cultural Resources
- Areas Where Rapid Development or Change in Land Uses is Likely to Occur
- Areas Where Development May Outpace the Availability of Community Facilities and Services, Including Transportation
- Areas in Need of Redevelopment or Significant Aesthetic Improvement
- Areas with Significant Infill Development Potential
- Large Abandoned Structures or Sites, Including Those Environmentally Contaminated
- Areas of Significant Disinvestment, Levels of Poverty, or Unemployment

In considering these categories, some of them tend to overlap one another. For instance, large abandoned sites or structures, including environmentally contaminated sites are typically also “areas in need of redevelopment.” As another example, those areas that are rapidly developing are also the same areas that are most likely to “outpace the availability of community facilities and services including transportation.” Therefore, the discussion in this chapter differs slightly from the organizational scheme provided in the administrative rules, and in some cases areas identified fall under more than one of the above-referenced categories.



More important than how the discussion is organized, we emphasize the overall intent of the rules. That is, we believe the exercise of identifying areas requiring special attention is primarily supposed to help the community formulate short-term programs for community facilities and community development, and to establish land use and environmental policies and regulations for areas that are not already adequately addressed in the local regulatory framework.

## **SIGNIFICANT NATURAL OR CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Natural and cultural resources are inventoried and shown on maps in the technical appendix of the community assessment. As noted in the supporting documentation, Commerce sits on very good, high ground that does not pose any significant potential complications for development. There are some flood plains and wetlands, but they are not substantial, and the city's development regulations adequately address requirements to protect those areas. There are some soils with severe limitations on septic tanks, but Commerce's urbanized area is served by sanitary sewer, and hence those areas do not rise to the level of requiring special attention. Similarly, Commerce has soils characterized as being prime agricultural, but those areas exist mostly in the center of town and agricultural preservation is not contemplated within the most urbanized areas of Commerce.

There are a substantial number of historic resources in Commerce. Again, these are mapped in the technical appendix. There is short-term concern about the protection and preservation of historic resources, but policy has not been established in this community assessment summary report. At this time, no historic resources are identified as areas requiring special attention. However, as a part of the community agenda, policy will be established, and the recommendations may include the establishment of one or more local historic districts and/or expansion of existing National Register districts. Not enough technical study has been accomplished at this point to comfortably delineate areas of special attention with regard to Commerce's historic resources. Therefore, there are no areas on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention with regard to natural and cultural resources.

## **AREAS REQUIRING SPECIAL ATTENTION**

There are a number of areas that are identified in this category and shown on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention, as described below.

### **Maysville Road (SR98) Corridor**

The entire SR 98 corridor from Maysville, crossing I-85, and into greater downtown Commerce, is shown as a corridor that will receive rapid growth during the next five years or when the economy recovers fully from the great recession of 2008-09. The whole corridor is not uniformly within the city limits of Commerce – in fact, sizable portions of it are unincorporated Jackson County. The City of Maysville, at the north end of the corridor, generally plans for the corridor to have sewer service extended from Commerce or Jackson County for commercial and industrial development in Maysville's city limits. There is a realistic chance that Maysville Road from Maysville city limits to greater downtown Commerce will become one seamless corridor developed with commercial and industrial land uses. Indeed, west of Interstate 85, major industrial development is planned and zoned in Commerce.

The Maysville Road corridor, in its entirety, has significant existing development along most of the corridor, interspersed with vacant lands. Substantial automobile-oriented development already exists. Maysville Road intersects with Interstate 85, which has older gas stations or

truck fuel stops at three of the four interchange quadrants. Due especially to location, this corridor is expected to witness a number of complex land use changes and issues, including redevelopment of underutilized lands or low-value commercial development, Greenfield development, industrial-residential land use conflicts, commercialization of currently residential areas, and potential complications with regard to intergovernmental delivery of services and utilities. This means that Jackson County and Commerce, both of which regulate land use in the corridor, need to coordinate access management, land use, utility provision, and aesthetic policies and regulations. The corridor east of Interstate 85 is also especially targeted for aesthetic improvement (see subcategory described below).

### **U.S. Highway 441 Corridor**

The entire corridor of U.S. Highway 441 from Banks County (Banks Crossing) past White Hill School Road is shown on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention. It is designated on the map primarily because commercial development is expected to progress along the highway from the Banks Crossing area into Commerce and unincorporated Jackson County. The U.S. Highway 441 corridor will likely to witness a mostly piecemeal, lot-by-lot commercial development pattern extending in a linear (and mostly progressive) fashion from Banks Crossing, at least for that part closest to Banks Crossing. Some of the corridor is served by sanitary sewer, and other parts are not. Commerce has annexed up to the western right-of-way of U.S. Highway 441, and in a few cases beyond it to the other side of U.S. Highway 441. This means that Jackson County and Commerce, both of which regulate land use in the corridor, need to coordinate access management, land use, utility provision, and aesthetic policies and regulations. Aesthetically, there is an opportunity for Commerce and Jackson County (unless annexed into Commerce) to extend streetscape improvements such as those installed in the Banks Crossing area, as development marches up the hill along U.S. 441 into Commerce.

Moving away from the immediate influence of Banks Crossing (i.e., the westernmost segment of the corridor), there are sizeable tracts that are vacant or agricultural. These tracts are prime developable real estate, with a variety of land use patterns possible depending on how well growth is managed. The whole corridor is not pre-zoned for commercial development, however. One would expect commercial development potential along most if not all of the U.S. Highway 441 corridor, but yet there are opportunities to plan the pattern and mixture of uses in a different way – one that anticipates the value of the corridor lands for major institutional development, and different scales of mixed-use development. One has to be most concerned about the possible occurrence along U.S. Highway 441 of pre-mature, unplanned, lower-value, piecemeal, commercial development occurring without provision of all urban utilities and services.

### **Zoned Commercial or Industrial Without Sewer Service**

The map of Areas Requiring Attention shows the western side of Interstate 85 as being zoned for industrial and commercial development but currently without sanitary sewer service. Zoning already exists in the City of Commerce for extensive industrial and significant commercial development on the west side of the Interstate 85 corridor. Hence, there is concern that this area will rapidly develop and is not adequately provided with urban services and facilities.

### **Outlet Mall Influence Area**

In addition to commercial development progressing along U.S. Highway 441 in a linear, corridor fashion, it is also expected that the Banks Crossing major activity node will expand peripherally into Jackson County. The map of Areas Requiring Special Attention formally recognizes this

potential development pattern which could raise a host of issues. In particular, the large vacant buildings formerly known as “The Pottery” already represent an important adaptive reuse issue/opportunity within Banks Crossing itself. One has to at least consider the possibility in the long-term future that the Banks Crossing outlet mall area will get entirely transformed into a different (more intense) scale of development, depending on utility availability.

Also, there are potentially three changes in terms of political responsibility in the influence area: Banks County, Jackson County, and the City of Commerce. The area is also more subject to police and law enforcement demands, and currently the City of Commerce police department is the likely to be the fastest service provider. Clearly, the Outlet Mall Influence Area could wind up being a hot spot for intergovernmental coordination issues and/or approaches.

### **Medical Campus Expansion Potential**

The area surrounding the BJC Medical Center is shown on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention primarily because it is likely to continue witnessing spinoff growth of medical offices which may extend into the adjacent residential neighborhoods. There is also an opportunity to make this area into a neighborhood commercial node. However, there is another reason why this area is shown as an Area Requiring Special Attention. It is anticipated that the BJC Medical Center could possibly leave its current location for a larger site. Indeed, there has already been some discussion about relocating the medical center. In that case, it is important to anticipate the reuse and/or redevelopment of the medical campus area, as medical practitioners are likely to follow the hospital to its new location, thus leaving significant vacancies in the current campus area. It is in Commerce’s best interest to plan for reuse and redevelopment of the current medical campus, if BJC Medical Center vacates the current location in favor of a larger property.

### **Major Institutions Sites Focus Area**

The map of Areas Requiring Special Attention also shows several large sites, primarily along U.S. Highway 441, for the potential accommodation of large institutional sites. While not usually planned for in a local government land use plan, it is important for Commerce to anticipate substantial additions to the institutional land uses in the city during the planning horizon. In particular, there will likely be demand for such uses as a new hospital (see discussion above), perhaps new schools, large churches, government uses, and perhaps even a satellite campus for a major university. The major institutions sites focus area overlaps the U.S. Highway 441 Corridor also shown on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention. The focus area is believed to reflect the most advantageous locations for major new institutions from a public facilities and services standpoint, as well as accessibility.

### **Road Connections with Development**

The map of Areas Requiring Special Attention also shows potential new roads cutting across large, currently vacant sites between the developed area of Commerce and U.S. Highway 441. These are shown to reflect the potential concern that future developments in some areas will overwhelm the existing roadway network if sites are developed without additions to the roadway network in a manner that provides connectivity. These suggested road connections are intended to illustrate that an enhanced, connected roadway network needs to be installed concurrent with development of several large, currently vacant tracts which will likely develop for commercial, mixed use, and institutional land use within the planning horizon or thereafter.



## **Land Use Transitional Areas**

The map of Areas Requiring Special Attention identifies three major areas where significant land use change is anticipated to occur. One such area is the Hospital Road corridor within the aforementioned Medical Campus Expansion Area. As already noted, this area is expected to witness additional medical office growth, so long as the BJC Medical Center maintains its current location. This could mean the conversion of residential properties for office uses, and perhaps additional supporting neighborhood commercial land uses.

A second area identified as potentially undergoing significant land use transitions in the future is that part of the Maysville Road (SR 98) corridor between Westwood Road and Jefferson Street (SR 15 Alt.) and including part of U.S. Highway 441 Business (Homer Road) past Carson Street. In this area, there are significant numbers of detached, single-family homes which front the highways, and it should be anticipated that there will be pressure to convert and/or redevelop them into commercial uses.

A third area is the SR 98 (Elm Street) corridor southeast of the downtown core, and also extending along SR 98 toward the U.S. Highway 441 corridor. That area is mostly developed with commercial uses, but is also expected to witness significant transitions in land use from single-family residential uses to commercial developments.

## **Significant Infill Development Potential**

As noted in the discussion of Quality Community Objectives, Commerce has some nonresidential sites that may offer nonresidential infill development potential, but it is more appropriate to characterize most of Commerce's nonresidential development opportunities as "Greenfield" rather than "infill." However, there are significant opportunities for residential infill development. Several lots and subdivisions are identified on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention where residential infill development can and should be encouraged.

## **Brownfield (Junkyard)**

The map of Areas Requiring Special Attention identifies two junkyards along U.S. Highway 441 as areas of concern. These junkyards are concerns for two reasons. First, with the large number of vehicles on these sites, there is significant potential (not necessarily documented occurrence) for the leakage of gasoline, motor oil, antifreeze, brake fluid, etc. into the ground and groundwater from the vehicles stored on site. This makes these areas potentially environmentally hazardous areas. Secondly, these junkyards are at least partially visible from U.S. Highway 441, and they negatively impact the aesthetics of the corridor. For these reasons, the two major junkyards along U.S. Highway 441 are identified for remediation, both environmentally and aesthetically. It is in Commerce's long-term interests that the largest of these junkyards be eventually phased out, discontinued, and cleaned up for reuse as a major institutional site, to the point that acquisition of that site should be considered within the planning horizon. The other junkyard may or may not be phased out but should at minimum be screened from public view.

## **Large Sites with Redevelopment Potential**

As noted elsewhere in this report, there are two major industrial sites that are accepted as having potential for significant redevelopment: The Oxford Property across from the Commerce

Civic Center in the downtown area; and the old mill site southeast of the downtown core, which is currently used for furniture storage and has a small “village” of homes beside it. There are other redevelopment opportunities, but these two reflect the major ones that should be considered priorities for redevelopment in Commerce.

### **Twin Creeks Subdivision – Abandoned Site**

This area was platted for residential lots, but no dwellings have been constructed. It is actually located outside the city limits of Commerce in unincorporated Jackson County, off of Old Bold Springs Church Road south of Maysville Road (SR 98). While this area is not currently in Commerce’s jurisdiction, it is close enough to have significant effects on city properties.

This area is a concern, primarily because the public streets in it provide access to anyone who wishes to discard wastes and use it as a dump site (as pictured elsewhere in this report). Also, the area is no longer maintained, and vegetation has grown up all the way to the curbs of the public streets. A third reason for concern, like all other vacant, “ghost” or “zombie” subdivisions of this sort, is that the market potential of these sites for residences may not be realized in the short-term (or perhaps long term), implying that reuse of the site for some other land use must be contemplated or anticipated.

### **Target Community Development Area**

The map of Areas Requiring Special Attention shows an area along U.S. Highway 441 Bus. (Homer Road) as an area that should be targeted for community development. This area is included on the map of Areas Requiring Special Attention because of a marked decline in terms of disinvestment. Though statistics are not available to substantiate, this area is also considered a concentration of poverty and unemployment. A number of public responses to upgrade this area should be initiated, including but not limited to housing rehabilitation, community development block grant funding for public improvements, community policing, and volunteer initiatives.

## **CHAPTER 4 PRELIMINARY CHARACTER AREAS**

The map of preliminary character areas is not a zoning map, and it is not an existing land use map, either. Rather, the preliminary character area map shows areas that have, or are expected to take on, unique characteristics that distinguish them from other parts of the city. The titles of these character areas imply there is a predominant land use for each. That is true for the suburban residential, institutional campus, highway commercial, and industrial workplace character areas in particular. However, the driving force behind preparing a character map is to identify unique character, as opposed to suggesting one specific land use. Some of the character areas may therefore consist of different land uses.

Confusion sometimes arises about whether the map of preliminary character areas is based on existing conditions or is intended to illustrate future desired characteristics. To some extent, both are true: the map has been drawn based on knowledge of existing conditions, yet it is “aspirational” in the sense that a vision is set forth for the future of each character area.

### **LIST OF PRELIMINARY CHARACTER AREAS**

The preliminary character area map contains the following areas which are described in detail in the pages that follow:

#### **MIXED USE AND COMMERCIAL AREAS**

- Downtown Commercial Core
- Greater Downtown
- Neighborhood Retail/Service – Mixed Use
- Mixed Use – Large-Scale Master Planned
- Highway Commercial

#### **SINGLE-FUNCTION AREAS**

- Institutional Campus
- Industrial Workplace
- Special Use Area (as designated)

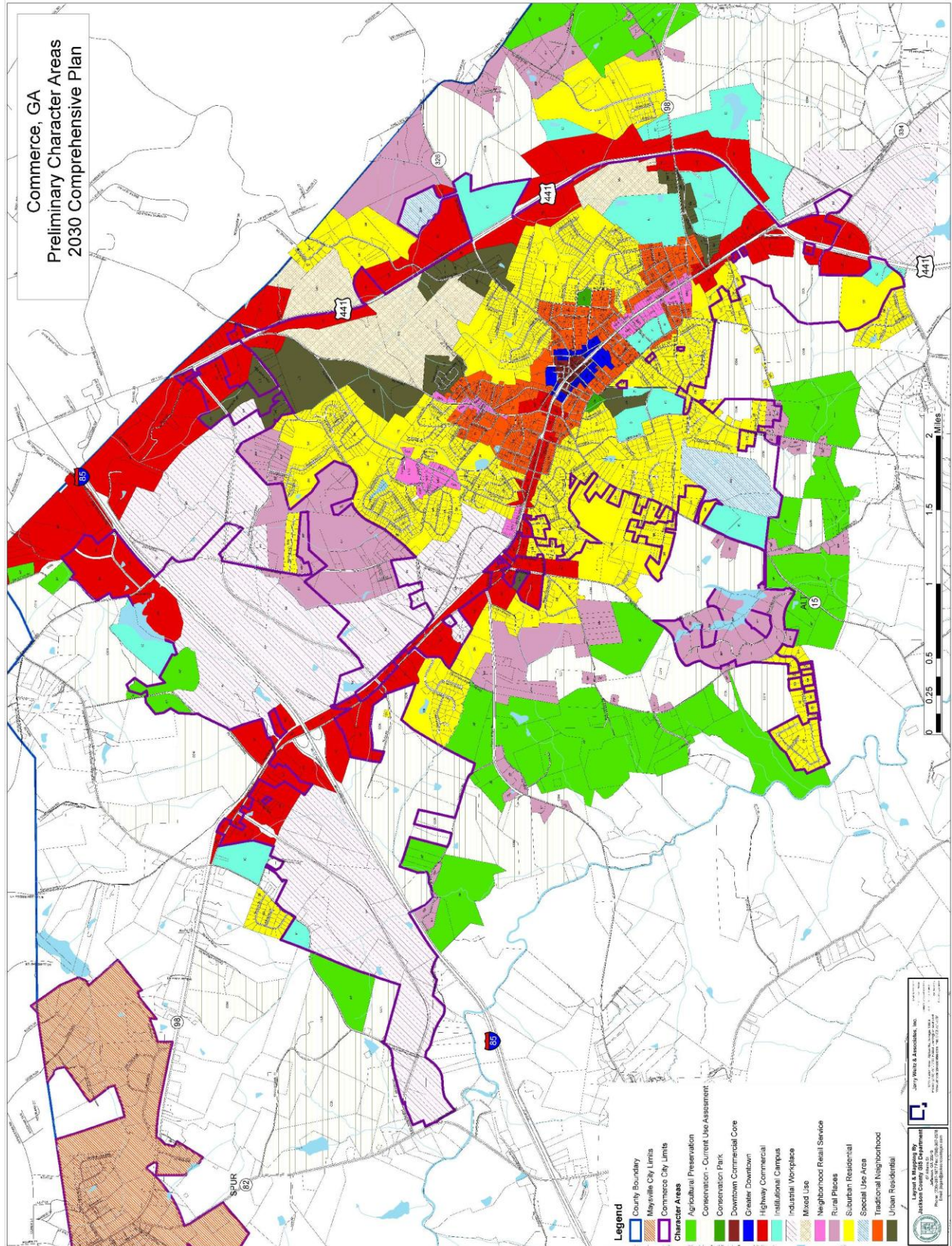
#### **RESIDENTIAL AREAS**

- Urban Residential
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Suburban Residential
- Rural Places

#### **CONSERVATION AND AGRICULTURAL AREAS**

- Conservation – Park, Open Space or Forest Preserve
- Agricultural Preservation, Including Current Use Assessment





## **DOWNTOWN CORE**

Summary Description:	Compact business core of the downtown
Defining Character:	Main street retail; shops primarily front the railroad and streets on both sides of the railroad
Location/Applicability:	Limited to one location
Relationship to Existing Development:	Existing development, one location only
Primary Land Uses:	Commercial (retail and service)
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Office, institutional; can include housing
Density or Intensity:	Highest intensity retail development
Street Pattern:	Very small blocks; grid pattern
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Zero or no setback on front; no lot coverage limitations
Parking Characteristics:	Individual sites do not have off-street parking; served by public parking lots and on-street parking
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Improved pedestrian streetscapes and major efforts to promote walkability
Sanitary Sewer	Available and required
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Served by small urban plaza/park
Redevelopment Prospects:	Possible but preservation ethic prevails
Overarching Principle(s):	Commercial core of city; identifiable sense of place
QCOs Implemented:	Regional Identity; Sense of Place; Employment Options; Appropriate Businesses; Heritage Preservation; Transportation Alternatives
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	CBD, Central Business District; Revised permitted uses to exclude uses not conducive to the downtown core's function
Additional Regulations Needed:	See downtown development design guidelines
Special Programs Needed:	Downtown Development Authority jurisdiction; streetscape improvements



### Downtown Core



**Aerial Photo Zoomed in on Commerce's Downtown Core**



**Pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and on-street parking characterize the Downtown Core.**



**Buildings in the downtown core provide a more or less continuous front that frames the streets. Street trees soften the building frontages.**



**Historic resources exist in the Downtown Core, and part of it is included on the National Register of Historic Places.**



**Streetscape improvements (wide sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, banners, trash receptacles) and on-street parking characterize Commerce's downtown core.**



**Side streets approaching the downtown core can be relatively narrow, with an alley-like appearance.**

## **GREATER DOWNTOWN**

Summary Description:	Compact mixed use fringe area taking on major characteristics of downtown core
Defining Character:	Area of potential extension of downtown core
Location/Applicability:	Surrounds the urban core (one location)
Relationship to Existing Development:	Existing development; significant additions encouraged through redevelopment and adaptive reuse
Primary Land Uses:	Commercial (retail and service)
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Office, institutional, can include housing
Density or Intensity:	May take on intensities of downtown core in some places; less intense at fringes
Street Pattern:	Block and street grid pattern; greater block lengths than found in downtown core
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Zero or no setback on front; lot coverage limitations similar to downtown core but less intense at fringes
Parking Characteristics:	Some sites have off-street parking; partially served by public parking lots and on-street parking
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Some sidewalks exist, but improved pedestrian streetscapes are needed to promote walkability
Sanitary Sewer	Available and required
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Served by small urban plaza/park
Redevelopment Prospects:	Encouraged but preservation ethic prevails
Overarching Principle(s):	Expansion of downtown core; redevelopment;
QCOs Implemented:	Regional Identity; Sense of Place; Appropriate Businesses; Employment Options; Heritage Preservation; Transportation Alternatives; Traditional Neighborhood; Infill Development
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	CBD, Central Business District (may need intensity limitations and redevelopment guidelines) OCR, Office-Commercial Residential
Additional Regulations Needed:	See downtown development design guidelines

Special Programs Needed: Downtown Development Authority jurisdiction; extension of streetscape improvements

### Greater Downtown



Greater Downtown surrounds the Downtown Core. Pedestrian access is provided but can be improved.



A rather abrupt change occurs between the Downtown Core and Greater Downtown. There are opportunities to expand the Core.



Redevelopment is appropriate in certain parts of the Greater Downtown, offering opportunities to extend the same building form as is in the Core.



Areas south of the Downtown Core transition to residential. Higher density housing on small lots or within mixed use buildings are appropriate in the Greater Downtown character area.



## **NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL/SERVICE – MIXED USE**

Summary Description:	Lower intensity version of downtown, mixed use district with a linear pattern following a major thoroughfare or railroad
Defining Character:	Railroad or major thoroughfare frontage; focal area for surrounding residential neighborhoods; transitional in nature
Location/Applicability:	Multiple locations: (1) U.S. Hwy. 441 Bus. southeast of greater downtown; (2) Old Maysville Road west of Hospital Road (3) Medical campus along Hospital Road; and (4) Homer Road (US Hwy. 441 Bus.) North of SR 98 at and around Pine Ave
Relationship to Existing Development:	Existing development; change of land use occurring primarily through adaptive reuse of single-family dwellings
Primary Land Uses:	Mix of single-family dwellings on small lots; adaptive reuse of dwellings for office, institutional, service, or retail uses
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Concentration of professional offices in medical campus; new construction via redevelopment in Homer Road area only
Density or Intensity:	Lower intensity compatible with abutting or nearby residential neighborhoods; limited generally small buildings (less than 5,000 square feet)
Street Pattern:	Linear pattern along railroad or major thoroughfare; block pattern exists or is preferred on adjacent blocks
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Varied, based on opportunities and existing character; building coverage varies depending on location
Parking Characteristics:	Off-street parking required, but at lower than typical ratios due to walking from adjacent neighborhoods
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Walkability is currently limited but is proposed to be improved with connections to adjacent neighborhoods; the major road is a through route and preserves the through-traffic function
Sanitary Sewer	Available and required
Park and Recreation Facilities:	None; in Homer Road area, small plazas and pocket parks may be incorporated via revitalization efforts
Redevelopment Prospects:	No, except for Homer Road area
Overarching Principle(s):	Compatible, low-intensity neighborhood mixed use
QCOs Implemented:	Traditional Neighborhoods; Appropriate Businesses; Employment Options; Transportation Alternatives

Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	C-1, Neighborhood Commercial District OCR, Office-Commercial Residential District
Additional Regulations Needed:	Some areas (except Homer Road) may require historic preservation jurisdiction to ensure maintenance of character
Special Programs Needed:	Community Development (Home Road area especially)

**Neighborhood Retail/Service – Mixed Use**



**U.S. Highway 441 Business has a combination of residences and businesses developed in a linear fashion along the railroad and parallel streets.**



**Medical Office Adjacent to Hospital. The BJC Medical Center Area is one area that fits this character description.**



**This historic residence along Old Maysville Road is an example of scale desired in this character area; it may be adaptively reused for business or office.**



**Along Homer Road, this vacant commercial store is the proper scale, and if redeveloped, can serve as a focal point for adjacent neighborhoods.**



## **LARGE-SCALE, MASTER-PLANNED MIXED USE**

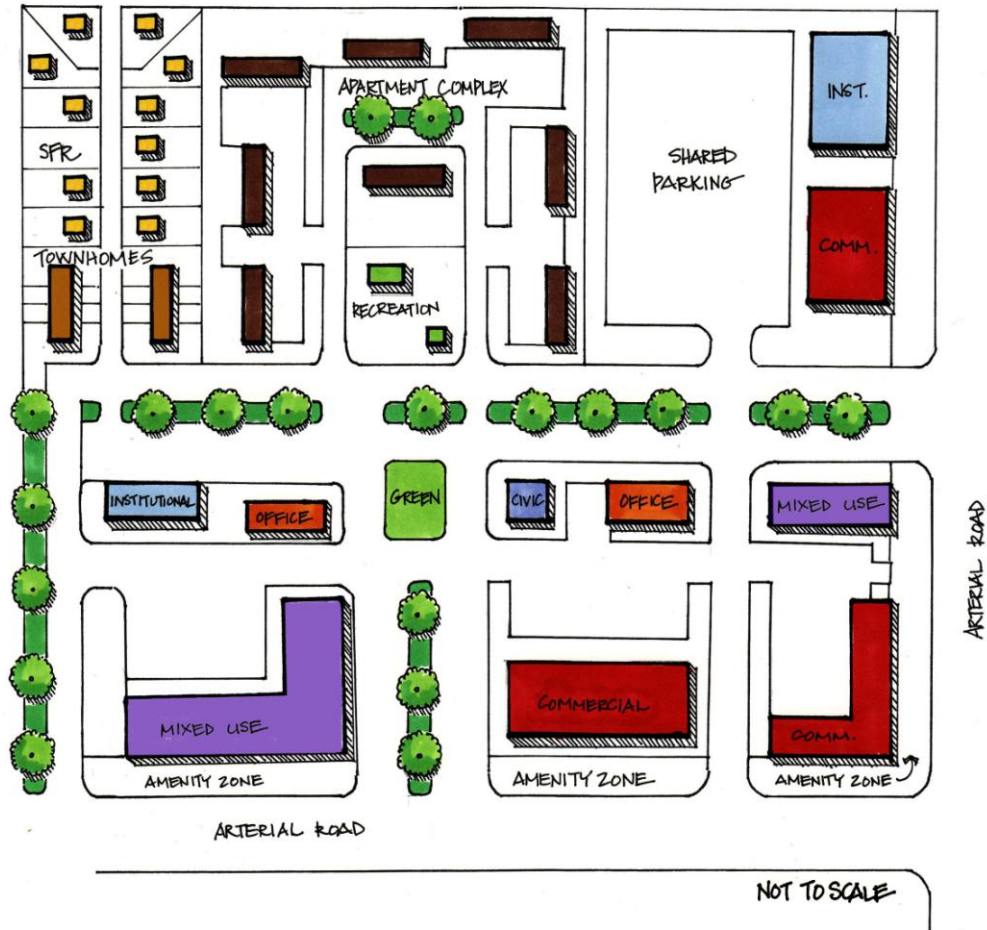
Summary Description:	Large-scale (25-40 acres or more) Greenfield sites planned with a complementary mix of uses based on market trends
Defining Character:	New, freestanding, complete communities
Location/Applicability:	Large, undeveloped sites along U.S. Hwy. 441
Relationship to Existing Development:	None; Greenfield sites – but they need to provide proper connections to adjacent built-up areas
Primary Land Uses:	Residential, commercial, office, civic-institutional, park and recreation; Primarily non-auto oriented commercial
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	None specified; all uses except industry are appropriate; auto-oriented uses by special use permit
Density or Intensity:	Generally at a scale slightly more dense than suburban shopping centers; may include Main St. retail and multiple story buildings; higher intensity at center, transitioning to lower density at edges
Street Pattern:	Block pattern preferred, including some blocks at scale of a downtown; use of alleys encouraged; through-traffic accommodated via new arterials or collectors
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Varied, based on location within master planned development; Main Street-style commercial at center
Parking Characteristics:	Off-street parking required; on-street parking may be provided, as well as off-street public parking lots
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Designed for walkability; all roads have sidewalks; may incorporate off-road trails.
Sanitary Sewer	Required and generally available
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Varied, from central greens to scattered urban plazas and pocket parks to neighborhood parks to greenways; minimum open space requirements applied
Redevelopment Prospects:	None (Greenfield)
Overarching Principle(s):	Complete community with jobs-housing balance
QCOs Implemented:	Sense of Place; Appropriate Businesses; Employment Options; Housing Opportunities; Transportation Alternatives; Open Space Preservation
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	Combination of current zoning districts; however, a new, master planned mixed-use zoning district is needed

Additional Regulations Needed:

Guidelines for mixed-use master-planned developments; Traffic impact study required

Special Programs Needed:

Market study to justify mix of uses and dwelling types included



ILLUSTRATIVE MIXED-USE ACTIVITY CENTER

Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc.  
Planning & Development Consultants

## **HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL**

Summary Description:	Predominantly automobile-serving commercial uses
Defining Character:	Suburban; shopping centers; outlet malls
Location/Applicability:	Multiple locations: (1) U.S. Hwy. 441; (2) U.S. Highway 441 Bus. West and southeast of greater downtown; SR 98 (Maysville Road) west and east of I-85; (4) Outlet Mall influence area at I-85 near Banks Crossing
Relationship to Existing Development:	Existing developed corridors except U.S. Hwy. 441 (mostly undeveloped) and Outlet Mall influence area
Primary Land Uses:	Lodging, big box retail, convenience stores, auto sales and service, outlet mall, fast-food restaurants, and shopping centers
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	A wide variety of additional uses are possible, including office and institutional; residential uses are generally not included
Density or Intensity:	Typically up to 15,000 square feet of building per acre
Street Pattern:	Primary access via highway; outlets formed by driveways; frontage roads encouraged; inter-parcel access required
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Mostly single-story buildings; Set back from highway frontage with parking in front; building coverage usually does not exceed 35 percent
Parking Characteristics:	Off-street parking required; some or most in front
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Automobile dominated but provisions for pedestrian access along highway and pedestrian connections to individual developments
Sanitary Sewer	Available in most locations; development discouraged without sewer except low-intensity, approved interim development
Park and Recreation Facilities:	None; minimum open space required; frontage landscape strips and buffers to side and rear when abutting residential districts
Redevelopment Prospects:	Revitalization and redevelopment encouraged in existing corridors; unlikely in Greenfield areas
Overarching Principle(s):	Serve the public traveling via auto; move regional through-traffic; improve aesthetics of existing development
QCOs Implemented:	Appropriate Business; Employment Options
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	C-2, General Commercial District

Additional Regulations Needed:

One or more specific architectural overlays; big-box retail ordinance (to discourage long-term vacancies)

Special Programs Needed:

Public street tree planting strips along existing highways; targeted economic development efforts to fill vacant spaces; may require redevelopment powers for obsolete/blighted buildings

### Highway Commercial



**Auto Dealership at U.S. 441 and U.S. 441 Bus. Pedestrian access is limited or non-existent.**



**Auto Dealership at SR 98 south of I-85.**



**Formerly home to a Bi-Lo food store, this shopping center on U.S. Highway 441 Business (Homer Road) is representative of several retail space vacancies in this character area.**



**Ingles Shopping Center @ U.S. 441 and SR 334**



### Highway Commercial



Walgreens, at U.S. 441 Bus. And SR 98, is set back from the street with parking in front.



This shopping center on SR 98 (Maysville Road, across the railroad) is representative of the auto-oriented character



Sign blight: Portable sign on roof; ground sign with panel missing



Screening of storage yard and commercial building.



Newer commercial development along U.S. Highway 441 with more landscaping



Inter-parcel connections between businesses on U.S. Highway 441 are needed.

## **INDUSTRIAL WORKPLACE**

Summary Description:	Manufacturing, industrial, storage and warehousing
Defining Character:	Suburban; truck-oriented; freestanding industrial sites; Storage and distribution centers; business parks
Location/Applicability:	Multiple locations: (1) North of I-85 north and south of SR 98 (Maysville Road); (2) East of I-85 north of SR 98 (Maysville Road); (3) SR 334 east of U.S. Hwy. 441
Relationship to Existing Development:	Some locations developed; mostly undeveloped in anticipation of future development
Primary Land Uses:	Manufacturing, industrial, storage and warehousing (usually single-function)
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Selected business, restaurants, and offices
Density or Intensity:	Up to 20,000 square feet per acre
Street Pattern:	Oriented to arterial or within planned industrial or business park designed to accommodate trucks; controlled (security) access to some individual sites
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Generous front building setbacks in campus-style setting; building coverage is 50 percent or less
Parking Characteristics:	Dominated by truck parking; off-street parking required
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Generally unsafe for walking due to truck traffic; pedestrian facilities provided along arterials and primary internal subdivision or industrial park streets
Sanitary Sewer	Available in some locations; development discouraged without sewer except low-intensity, approved interim development
Park and Recreation Facilities:	None; minimum open space required; variable campus –style design; buffers at side and rear when abutting residential districts
Redevelopment Prospects:	Unlikely (mostly Greenfield locations)
Overarching Principle(s):	Provide employment within industries and workplaces that capitalize on location of major thoroughfare or limited access highway; movement of freight/goods
QCOs Implemented:	Appropriate Business; Employment Options
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	M-1, Light Industrial District M-2, Heavy Manufacturing

Additional Regulations Needed:

Campus site planning guidelines; industrial and business park covenants;

Special Programs Needed:

Formal industrial recruitment strategies/efforts

### Industrial Workplace



Industrial building within industrial Park



Steve Reynolds Industrial Boulevard (looking north) is ready for industrial development



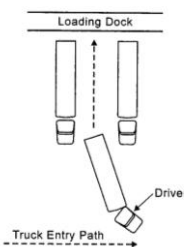
Monument-style entrance Signage Suggests Quality Environment



Green edge along street includes shrubs and mature street trees; Individual ground signs are small/low to ground



New Industrial Workplaces Planned for I-85



Truck traffic and large loading areas are characteristic of this area

Source: Stover, Vergil G., and Frank J. Koepke. 2002. *Transportation and Land Development* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Washington, DC: Institute of Transportation Engineers. Figure 10-5, p. 10-9.



## **INSTITUTIONAL CAMPUS**

Summary Description:	School and Major Institutional Campuses
Defining Character:	Free-standing, single-function
Location/Applicability:	Multiple locations (schools and future designated sites)
Relationship to Existing Development:	Existing school campuses; mostly undeveloped in anticipation of future development
Primary Land Uses:	Public and private schools; hospitals; large churches and other religious institutions; utility offices; major governmental installations, institutionalized residential living facilities
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	None specified; may be flexible through special use process; may be mixed uses integrated
Density or Intensity:	Single-story up to 20,000 square feet; multi-story with FARs of up to 0.75
Street Pattern:	Large block (usually 20-40 acres or more) with controlled or limited access; secondary access encouraged
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Generous front building setbacks in campus-style setting; building coverage is 40 percent or less; may include multiple-story buildings up to four stories
Parking Characteristics:	Frequent traffic; high turnover parking; truck delivery or bus traffic; off-street parking required; larger, more dense institutions may make use of structured parking
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Pedestrian access essential for schools; other facilities may have limited internal pedestrian activity but must provide for pedestrian movement from major road into the development
Sanitary Sewer	Required and generally available, or can be extended
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Schools have ballfields and playgrounds; others generally lack improved recreation except as may be provided on individual basis by employers; minimum open space requirement
Redevelopment Prospects:	Unlikely (mostly Greenfield locations)
Overarching Principle(s):	Provide the institutional needs of the public
QCOs Implemented:	Educational Opportunities; Appropriate Business; Employment Options
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	Generally permitted in all zoning districts

Additional Regulations Needed: Traffic impact study may be required

Special Programs Needed: None, except coordination with school board for infrastructure

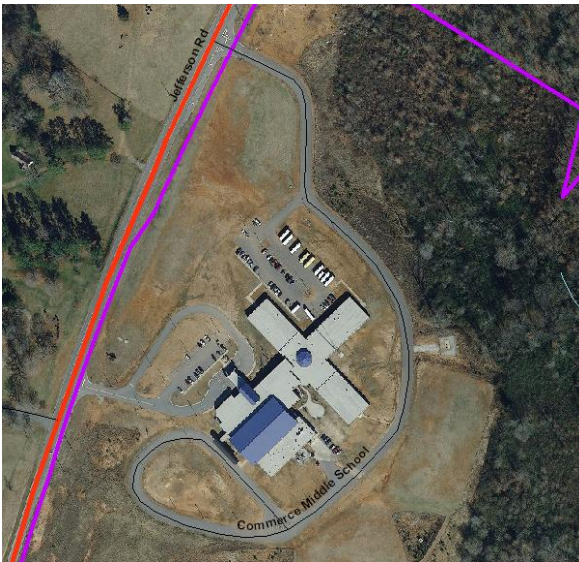
### Institutional Campus



**New School Under Construction,  
Main School Campus**



**Historic Church Campus  
off U.S. Highway 441 Bus.**



**Commerce Middle School Campus**

**SPECIAL USE AREA (AS SPECIFIED)**

Summary Description:	Single-function special land use (as specified)
Defining Character:	None that can be generalized; depends on special use
Location/Applicability:	Golf course; treatment plant
Relationship to Existing Development:	Assigned to existing facilities only
Primary Land Uses:	Any special use as assigned and described
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Uses accessory or incidental to the principal uses
Density or Intensity:	Varied depending on use
Street Pattern:	Usually single-controlled access from arterial
Building Orientation and Coverage:	According to master plan
Parking Characteristics:	Varied depending on use
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Generally not conducive to pedestrian access but may vary based on use
Sanitary Sewer	Depends on the particular use
Park and Recreation Facilities:	None; or use itself may be recreation oriented
Redevelopment Prospects:	Generally none
Overarching Principle(s):	Provide for the essential utility, recreation, or other needs of the public
QCOs Implemented:	None that can be generalized
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	Best handled through special use permit process
Additional Regulations Needed:	Specific use regulations desirable
Special Programs Needed:	None



**Golf Course**



**Treatment Plant**

**URBAN RESIDENTIAL**

Summary Description:	Urban-density communities
Defining Character:	Usually master-planned with amenities and buffers
Location/Applicability:	Various locations
Relationship to Existing Development:	Several existing; some Greenfield
Primary Land Uses:	Mobile home parks in some existing locations; apartments, condominiums, and townhouses
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Ancillary civic-institutional; active recreation
Density or Intensity:	6-8 units per acre existing; 12-14 acres Greenfield
Street Pattern:	Usually single access from arterial or collector street; may be arranged in block pattern with or without alleys; private streets are typical; controlled access permitted
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Generally courtyard style around parking and green spaces
Parking Characteristics:	Varied off-street parking; in front of unit; grouped in common bays; on-street parking permitted; structured parking unlikely but possible
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Planned adjacent to and with access to commercial development; entire site is planned with pedestrian sidewalks; off-site trails optional/encouraged
Sanitary Sewer	Required and available or can be extended
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Active and/or passive recreation required for new developments
Redevelopment Prospects:	Generally none, except for manufactured home parks in prime commercial locations; mostly Greenfield)
Overarching Principle(s):	Mixed, higher density housing types
QCOs Implemented:	Housing Options
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	R3, Two-Family Residential District (Medium Density) R4, Multi-Family Residential; R5, Single-Family Residential District for Manufactured Home Parks and Subdivisions
Additional Regulations:	None except perhaps for evaluation of permitted densities



**Urban Residential**



**Apartments**

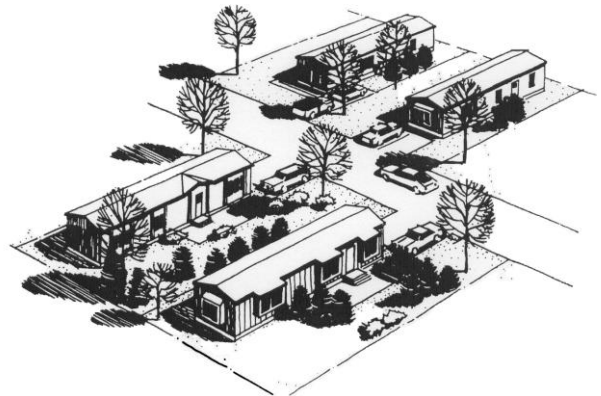


**Manufactured Home Park**



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**Apartment fronting Street**



Source: *Time-Saver Standards for Housing and Residential Development*. 2nd Ed. Joseph De Chiara, Julius Panero, and Martin Zelnik, Editors. New York: McGraw-Hill Professional, 1995. Chapter 11, Figure 17, p. 977.

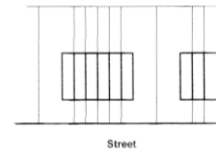
**Manufactured Homes**



**Townhouses/Condominiums**



Source: John Matusik and Daniel Deible. "Grading and Earthwork." Figure 24.30 in *Land Development Handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002, p. 571.



**Townhouses**  
(Attached Single Family Fee Simple)

**Townhouses**

## TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD

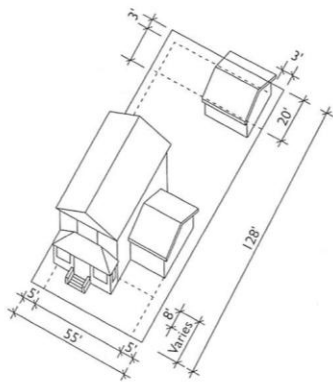
Summary Description:	Pre-1960s residential neighborhoods located close to downtown or other commercial activity center
Defining Character:	In-town convenience; smaller lots; grid street pattern
Location/Applicability:	North and south of downtown core and greater downtown character area
Relationship to Existing Development:	All existing, though there is potential for extension of existing traditional neighborhoods into adjacent vacant lands
Primary Land Uses:	Detached, single-family dwellings on individual lots
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	May have attached housing types (no more than 20 percent of total units); ancillary civic-institutional; parks and recreation; accessory dwelling units above garages are possible; home occupations
Density or Intensity:	3-5 units per acre existing; up to 6 units; residential lots as low as 5,000 square feet
Street Pattern:	Arranged in block pattern with or without alleys; no private streets or controlled access; narrow block widths; cul-de-sacs prohibited
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Close to front street; front porches encouraged; Narrow lot widths (50-70 feet)
Parking Characteristics:	Off-street parking (1-2 spaces per unit) from rear of lot only; on-street parking permitted
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Sidewalks along both sides of all streets; facilities may be lacking in existing areas
Sanitary Sewer	Required and available
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Existing parks may be within walking distance; new development incorporates small playgrounds and “greens”
Redevelopment Prospects:	Not anticipated but not precluded in existing areas
Overarching Principle(s):	Denser, walkable residential dwelling with some land use variety
QCOs Implemented:	Sense of Place; Housing Options; Traditional Neighborhoods; Infill Development; Transportation Alternatives
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	R3, Two-Family Residential District is closest; however, a new TND, Traditional Neighborhood Development District is needed

Additional Regulations      Guidelines for traditional neighborhood development

Special Programs Needed:    None



**Traditional neighborhoods ring many parts of the Greater Downtown Commerce character area, some with adequate sidewalks, others without sufficient pedestrian amenities.**



Source: Kindell, Peter J., "Building Types," p. 189 in *Planning and Urban Design Standards*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2006)

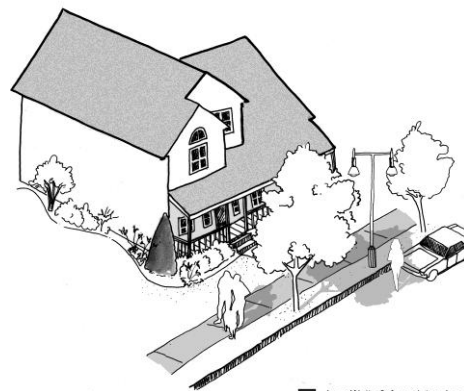


Source: Hill, John, W. *Design Characteristics of Maryland's Traditional Communities*, Figure 4, p. 5.1-2 in *Time Saver Standards for Urban Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003)

**Narrow lots, shallow front building setbacks, front porches, and garages located to the rear are desirable characteristics.**



**Homes near potential redevelopment area.**



Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc.  
Planning & Development Consultants

**Illustrative Dwelling in Traditional Neighborhood**

## **SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL**

Summary Description:	Conventional suburban subdivisions
Defining Character:	Curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs
Location/Applicability:	Multiple locations, usually outside walking distance of downtown
Relationship to Existing Development:	Almost all locations are existing
Primary Land Uses:	Detached, single-family dwellings on individual lots
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	May include churches or other civic-institutional uses; parks may be located within subdivision; home occupations
Density or Intensity:	As low as 0.6 acre lot without sewer; generally not more than 1.0 acre lots
Street Pattern:	Curvilinear; cul-de-sacs, usually connected to collector streets but may abut arterials; cut through traffic discouraged by design or via traffic calming measures
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Front setbacks are typically 25-35 feet and more, with other yards at least 10 feet in width; Lot widths are 70-100 feet and more
Parking Characteristics:	Off-street parking (2 spaces or more per unit); On-street parking may be permitted but is discouraged
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Sidewalks required within 1 mile of schools; encouraged in other locations on at least one side of street; facilities may be lacking in existing areas
Sanitary Sewer	Typically available though not required
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Served by existing off-site parks; new, larger subdivisions incorporate green or park space
Redevelopment Prospects:	None
Overarching Principle(s):	“American Dream” suburban homes
QCOs Implemented:	Housing Choices; Infill Development
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	R1, Single-Family Residential (Low Density) R2, Single-Family Residential (Medium Density)
Additional Regulations Needed:	None specified



### Suburban Residential



**Suburban Neighborhood in Commerce**



**Upscale Home**



**Streets are wide and usually curvilinear**



CONVENTIONAL SUBURBAN SUBDIVISION

Jerry Weitz & Associates, Inc.  
Planning & Development Consultants

**Conventional Suburban Subdivision Layout**



## RURAL PLACES

Summary Description:	Rural living amidst undeveloped lands and agriculture
Defining Character:	Rural (lack of regularity)
Location/Applicability:	At the edges of the suburban area in places lacking sewer service; new development may be planned as large-lot (estate) subdivisions
Relationship to Existing Development:	All locations are existing
Primary Land Uses:	Detached, single-family dwellings on individual lots
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	Farms, forests, gardens, and orchards; livestock raising (may require special permit); farm storage buildings; new public schools prohibited
Density or Intensity:	Maximum density is typically one unit per acre; many areas have much lower density (up to five-acre tracts)
Street Pattern:	Irregular, based on old farm access patterns; low-volume, narrower thoroughways (may be private drives); curvilinear designs acceptable cul-de-sacs discouraged; open space or conservation subdivisions encouraged at very low densities.
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Front setbacks are generous (60-100 feet or more typical); varied, irregular frontage; some lots may lack road frontage
Parking Characteristics:	No organized parking facilities except for garages and usually unpaved areas in front of or at side of house
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Generally no improved pedestrian facilities available; narrow roads are used by pedestrians without conflict due to low traffic volumes
Sanitary Sewer	Not available and not planned; rely on septic tanks
Park and Recreation Facilities:	None – surrounding open spaces and farms provide for open space character and feel
Redevelopment Prospects:	None (inapplicable)
Overarching Principle(s):	Open space and low-density rural settlement
QCOs Implemented:	Sense of Place; Housing Choices; Environmental protection due to low density involved

Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate: AR, Agricultural Residential District  
R1E, Single-Family Estate Residential

Additional Regulations Needed: None specified

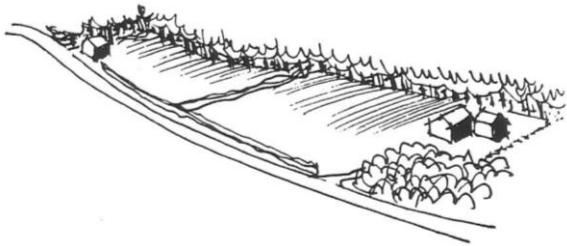
Special Programs Needed: None specified



Rural residences are typically located on narrower, unpaved roads, amidst agricultural lands.

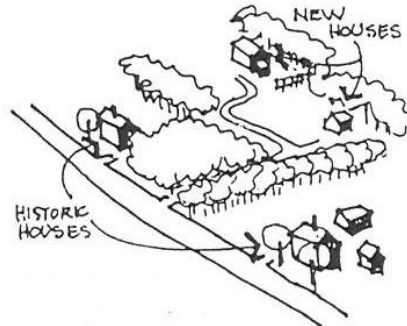


Land along Woods Bridge Road, just outside Commerce, quickly becomes rural in character.



Source: Craighead, Paula M., Editor. The Hidden Design in Land Use Ordinances, Figure 31, p. 36 and Figure 50, p. 53. (Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, 1991)

**Siting homes at edges of fields rather than in the middle of them helps retain rural character.**



**Where historic rural residences exist, new homes should be set back to let them dominate the rural road scene.**



**Rural Settlement Pattern along Woods Bridge Road Outside Commerce**

## **AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION, INCLUDING CONSERVATION USE ASSESSMENT**

Summary Description:	Large tracts of farmland and forests
Defining Character:	Rural (lack of regularity) and agrarian
Location/Applicability:	Beyond the suburban fringe, further out beyond rural places (limited applicability in City of Commerce)
Relationship to Existing Development:	All locations are existing (outside urban service areas)
Primary Land Uses:	Farms and farm-related uses and buildings; farm dwellings (single-family)
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	None
Density or Intensity:	Larger farms are 35 acres or more; generally 10 acres is minimum to qualify for the current use assessment program; minimum lot size outside the current use assessment program is 8 acres; permissions for occasional lot creation, usually for family members
Street Pattern:	Lack of improved street access; narrow, usually single-lane driveways or gravel roads; long without turnarounds
Building Orientation and Coverage:	Varied and irregular frontage; some lots may lack road frontage
Parking Characteristics:	No organized parking facilities except for garages and usually unpaved areas in front of or at side of house
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Generally no improved pedestrian facilities available; narrow roads are used by pedestrians without conflict due to low traffic volumes
Sanitary Sewer	Not available and not planned; rely on septic tanks
Park and Recreation Facilities:	None – surrounding open spaces and farms provide for open space character and feel
Redevelopment Prospects:	None (inapplicable)
Overarching Principle(s):	Open space; working rural landscapes
QCOs Implemented:	Sense of Place; Open Space; Environmental Protection, due to low density involved
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	A-F, Agricultural Farm District

Additional Regulations Needed:            None specified

Special Programs Needed:            None specified



**Agricultural land in the current use assessment (conservation valuation) program of Jackson County. Property is in Commerce, just south of I-85.**



**Pasture land with livestock, just outside Commerce, north of I-85. Also in the conservation valuation program.**



**CONSERVATION – PARK, OPEN SPACE, OR FOREST PRESERVE**

Summary Description:	Undeveloped or Active or Passive Recreation
Defining Character:	Open space; green space
Location/Applicability:	Within residential neighborhoods
Relationship to Existing Development:	All locations are existing
Primary Land Uses:	Parks; playgrounds, passive recreation
Secondary or Possible Land Uses:	None
Density or Intensity:	Inapplicable
Street Pattern:	Served by neighborhood local street(s)
Building Orientation and Coverage:	None; recreation buildings if they exist are master planned
Parking Characteristics:	Off-site parking spaces are grouped together, usually in a single lot
Pedestrian Friendliness:	Access from adjacent residential neighborhoods strongly desirable; existing facilities may be inadequate
Sanitary Sewer	Probably available but not needed
Park and Recreation Facilities:	Varied from picnic tables to playgrounds to ball fields to passive recreational facilities
Redevelopment Prospects:	None (inapplicable)
Overarching Principle(s):	Recreation
QCOs Implemented:	Open Space; Environmental protection, if sensitive environmental areas are included on the site
Existing Zoning Districts Appropriate:	Not applicable; permitted use in virtually all zoning districts
Additional Regulations Needed:	Guidelines for conservation easements
Special Programs Needed:	Purchase of development rights; transfer of development rights



**Willoughby Park**



**Gazebo at Willoughby Park**

## **CHAPTER 5 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

One of the more important items about this community assessment report is that it is intended to provide a list of issues and opportunities that the comprehensive plan “community agenda” (i.e., the next step, the “plan part of the plan”) will further analyze and for which recommended actions will be stated. At this stage of the process, there is no concerted effort to “solve” problems, establish policies, or reconcile issues. Rather, we simply want to identify them for further study but we are not definitive at this point about how we are going to address a particular issue or opportunity. The issues and opportunities are divided into substantive areas, such as population, housing, economy, and so forth.

### **POPULATION**

#### **Addressing the Needs of an Increasingly Elderly Population**

A significant percent of seniors in Commerce as of 2000, which is expected to increase even more significantly during the planning horizon, means that Commerce’s comprehensive plan should confront issues of how housing, facilities, and services will need to change to accommodate the growing senior population. For instance, housing preferences change as more seniors move in, or current residents age in place – this may signal a need for housing that is more suitable for the senior population. It may also signal a significant increase in the need for retirement communities and alternative living arrangements including care facilities.

#### **Capitalizing on the Advantages of Having Seniors in the Community**

Commerce’s comprehensive plan should also delve into the positive aspects of having a larger than typical senior population. While many seniors have fixed, limited incomes, others have retirement incomes. Hence, the buying power in the community can potentially be a benefit to the city. This may also translate into higher demands for health care and businesses that cater to the needs of seniors. Some communities embrace the notion that they are “retirement” communities and have resources and programs that are “senior friendly.” As another example, seniors have often retired from the workforce and therefore have significant leisure or free time available to volunteer for community enhancement efforts. Commerce’s comprehensive plan should explore these possibilities and consider recommendations to become a senior-friendly community and capitalize on the volunteer potential that a healthy senior population provides.

#### **Lower-Income Households and Implications**

Based on 2000 data, the assessment indicates that Commerce has a larger-than-average share of lower-income households when compared with the county as a whole. Generally, cities are not significant providers of social services, and they tend to rely on higher levels of government (county, state, and federal), and the private sector (e.g., Habitat for Humanity, churches, etc.) for various means of social assistance to help needy households. One issue that should be discussed in the planning process is the extent to which city government can and should be involved in responding to the specific needs of low-income households. The role of some beneficial services like community development should be considered and if appropriate supported in the comprehensive plan. See also housing issues in the next subsection.

## HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### Balanced Housing

There is a trend toward encouraging higher end housing in Commerce. While to some extent that is appropriate, one should recognize the limitations on the market for such housing. Commerce is largely a blue collar town, and the city's housing policies need to recognize the continued need for low and moderate income housing.



Single-family Dwelling in Commerce

### Public Housing

Commerce has a housing authority and has also engaged in community development efforts in the past. Direct social services by the city to lower-income households, such as the construction of additional lower income housing units, are unlikely, given that those services are provided privately and by higher levels of government. The role of public housing should be addressed in the comprehensive plan.



Public Housing (Apartments) in Commerce

### Special Needs Housing

Generally, there is a correlation between age and disabilities – as age increases, so too does the likelihood or occurrence of disabilities. It has already been established in Chapter 2 that Commerce has a disproportionate amount of elderly, and the percent of total population who are seniors is expected to increase significantly over time. The implications with regard to housing the senior population and persons with disabilities is fairly self-evident. Persons with significant mental, sensory, or physical disabilities need assistance within and outside the home. This places most of the housing needs for disabled persons in the area of “institutionalized” care, which may translate into more nursing and group homes.

However, some of the people with disabilities will reside, if opportunities exist, within detached single-family residences with limited supervision and care, or in other words, outside the context of institutionalized living arrangements. While living as any other household in a single-family detached dwelling is desirable, some communities regulate them as group homes and do not allow them outright as a permitted use in single-family zoning districts. Providing opportunities for compatible “community living arrangements” in single-family zoning districts is consistent with the state’s quality community objective for “housing choices.” Therefore, local zoning regulations need to be evaluated to ensure that they provide appropriate housing opportunities for disabled populations, without discrimination by other households in the neighborhood. The



plan should establish policies and outline code revisions needed to accomplish the objectives of fair housing for the disabled.

### **Accessory Housing Units**

Accessory dwelling units are increasingly used in other areas for housing elderly persons who wish to remain close to their families. Seniors are often reluctant to move out of their own unit because the environment is familiar and they are emotionally attached to their homes.<sup>1</sup> For detached single-family units owned by single seniors, converting the unit to a principal dwelling with an accessory dwelling unit would allow seniors to stay in their unit while another household occupies previously unused portions of the home. As the homeowner, the senior has the option of living in either the apartment or primary dwelling. The added income and security of having another person close by can be a deciding factor in enabling a homeowner to age in place. Accessory apartments for the elderly also would permit seniors to have some independence while maintaining close proximity to one or more family members. Zoning ordinances can provide for the establishment of attached accessory units in existing single-family subdivisions as another method of meeting needs for affordable housing. Current regulations should carefully consider whether appropriate opportunities are provided for accessory apartments.

### **Housing for Seniors**

As the population ages, there will be more and more demands for housing types and arrangements that are conducive to elderly and senior citizens.

### **Manufactured Housing**

The city currently has a variety of manufacturing housing developments, including single-wide and double-wide homes on individual lots, and manufactured home parks. At issue is the extent to which Commerce will continue to allow manufactured housing as an option for affordable, workforce housing, and the extent to which it needs to balance those needs with regulations on the location, placement, and aesthetic characteristics of manufactured homes.

### **Apartments and Higher Density Housing Options**

While Commerce has its own significant share of multi-family units, it is likely that the city will need more apartments as its commercial and industrial workplaces develop. The city should anticipate those needs and plan for them, but they must be in balance with the expectations of the community with regard to the proper and desirable proportions of multi-family to single-family housing opportunities.

### **Inclusionary Zoning and Mixed Income Housing Strategies**

Inclusionary zoning is a tool that specifies a certain percentage of affordable homes must be included in a given development. Mixed income housing strategies specifically attempt to mix together home types for different income groups in the same development. Commerce's community agenda should consider whether these tools are appropriate in certain locations, in order to meet housing opportunities objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Howe, Deborah A., Nancy J. Chapman, and Sharon A. Baggett. 1994. *Planning for an Aging Society*. Planning Advisory Service Report No. 451. Chicago: American Planning Association.

## **Minimum House Sizes**

Local governments often regulate the size of dwelling units by zoning district. Commerce should critically consider whether minimum house sizes (heated floor area per dwelling unit requirements) are necessary and/or the extent to which such requirements may restrict workforce housing and housing unit affordability.

## **Community Development**

It is also acknowledged that Commerce has some of the lower value housing in the county as a whole, and lower property values. During the planning horizon, Commerce may need to initiate more concerted efforts to maintain, stabilize, and enhance certain residential neighborhoods in the city. The community agenda should be specific about what types of community development activities are needed and where such programs will need to be target for the most effective impact.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Growth of Health Care Industries**

With the national, state and local economies suffering in a major recession which started in the third quarter of 2008, one of the industries least impacted by those downward spiraling economic trends was the health care industry. That is one of Commerce's strengths, as it has the only hospital in Jackson County (and the only one accessible to other major parts of Banks and Madison Counties). As such Commerce is poised to continue growing its economy in the health care industries. Another benefit of growing health care industries in Commerce is that there is a shortage of the number of jobs in health care when compared with the number of Jackson County residents working in health care. Exactly what should be done to maintain and enhance that status, however, should be carefully explored as a strong economic development opportunity in the comprehensive plan.

### **Transportation and Warehousing**

Clearly, Jackson County has much potential to further develop this type of industry (transportation and warehousing), given its many miles of frontage along both sides of Interstate 85, as well as two important north-south US. Highways (129 and 441). Commerce, in particular, is well suited for this type of industrial growth if it desires, given that it has much frontage on U.S. Highway 441 and has annexed across Interstate 85. As noted above, Jackson County has more workers in these industries than there are jobs in Jackson County, suggesting that attraction of new jobs in this industry will be beneficial to the county's working residents desiring to maintain employment inside the county versus commuting outside the county.



**Huge potential exists for Commerce to attract warehousing and distribution centers, such as this one developed in the I-85 corridor west of Commerce, in unincorporated Jackson County.**

## Industrial Development along Interstate 85

The city is situated with many opportunities to develop with industries and manufacturing in several places along I-85.



North side of Interstate 85 between SR 82 Spur and SR 98 (Maysville Road) has been annexed and zoned for industrial development



North and south of Interstate 85, between SR 98 (Maysville Road) and U.S. Highway 441 is slated for future industrial as well as commercial development

## Connection to Racing: Auto Enthusiasts and Weekend Warriors

There is a largely unrecognized automobile enthusiast culture in Commerce, stemming partly from racing opportunities in the region, including but not limited to Road Atlanta, Gresham Motorsports, and Atlanta Dragway (though none is within Commerce). There are also some so-called “weekend warriors” who help make up this culture in Commerce. This activity has some spin-off economic effects, such as small auto shops, decals for cars, motor work, etc. Commerce should view this as an opportunity for economic development.

## Downtown Infill Development

Commerce allows for a lot of “Greenfield” development. It is already plagued with a good bid of vacant space especially in shopping centers. It is difficult to recruit big box retailers when there is so much available space now (not precisely quantified). There is concern that if commercial development continues along US 441 outside of downtown, that it will adversely affect the downtown business district. All of these trends work against the health of the downtown business core and pose challenges to the city’s efforts to maintain a healthy downtown core.



Older shopping centers such as this one along Maysville Road (SR 98) may be threatened by newer retail development opportunities

## Two Redevelopment Opportunities

There are two primary opportunities for redevelopment of so-called “brownfields.” The first is the old mill site currently occupied by IFI (furniture) for distributing furniture. The second is the old sewing plant (a.k.a., “Oxford Property” and QRM). Both of these should be shown as areas



requiring special attention (potential redevelopment sites). Then, look for tools that are applicable for redevelopment, such as “opportunity zones” and “enterprise zones.” The city might call for Tax Allocation Districts (TADs) in these two areas, or tax abatement, or business improvement districts or Community Improvement Districts (CIDs), or some other tool to incentivize redevelopment. There are also some other blighted buildings in the downtown. These areas need to be further evaluated for redevelopment prospects, and specific redevelopment concepts and programs identified in the community agenda.



**Mill Village, U.S. Highway 441 Bus.  
south of downtown core**



**Oxford Property, with Commerce  
Civic Center in Background**

### **Cultural Center and Other DDA Ownerships**

The DDA runs the Cultural Center facility in Commerce, including leasing and rental. The cultural center has a capacity to hold about 250 people. DDA also owns the building in which the DDA office is located. And it owns various lots in the city for parking (see later discussion). Issues generally involve the management and expansion of these properties and their role in the city’s economic development program.



**Attractive landscaped entrance in front  
of Commerce Cultural Center**

Using a Rural Business Enterprise Grant, the City of Commerce is renovating the building immediately below the DDA office as a business information center which will include information as well as meeting and training space (approximately 2,100 square feet total). Also, this new facility will have public restrooms, the first public ones available in the downtown. This facility’s role in the overall downtown development program should be highlighted and emphasized in the community agenda.



## Civic Center

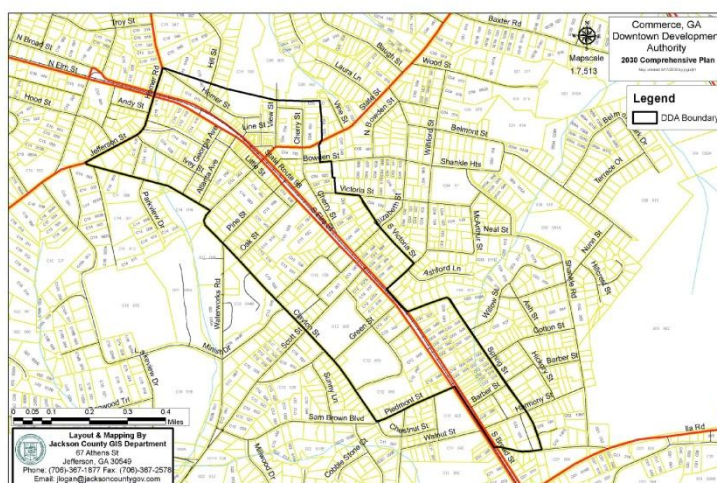
The Civic Center is operated by the city's Civic Center and Tourism Authority. The bottom floor is currently leased out, but there is ultimately room for expansion. Current capacity for meetings is 1,000 people or more, roughly. There are opportunities to capitalize on this facility in terms of economic development (i.e., large enough to recruit some professional association conferences and such if lodging were nearby and a more conducive mix of restaurants were provided).



**Commerce Civic Center**  
Photo Credit: W. A. Storing

## Boundary of Downtown Development Authority

The boundary of the DDA was discussed and is mapped in the comprehensive plan. While there are benefits to having tools available to a large area, there is some concern that the DDA boundary is actually too large – options for shrinking it should be considered, although the opposite perspective is acknowledged also (that some might favor a larger DDA boundary). Hence it is an issue to be resolved in the comprehensive plan.



**Boundary, Commerce Downtown Development Authority**

## Festivals

Much of the tourist traffic in the downtown is associated with various festivals sponsored by the city and downtown merchants (e.g., Fridays after Five, Georgia Council for the Arts). At issue is the extent such events can be maintained and even expanded for economic development purposes.

## Annual DDA Work Plan

A bullet list of work program items called “2009 plan of work” has been established by the Downtown Development Authority and needs to be integrated as appropriate in the short-term work program of the comprehensive plan.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

### 1993 Historic Resources Inventory

There is a 1993 detailed inventory of historic resources in five volumes. The history and resources have generally been summarized in available printed and web documents, but the community agenda may need to go further in terms of identifying and summarizing the existing historic resources inventory.



**There are a multitude of historic resources in Commerce**  
Photo Credit: W. A. Storing

### Demolition Ordinance

Commerce adopted a demolition ordinance with regard to historic resources, but it does not prevent demolition of historic buildings.

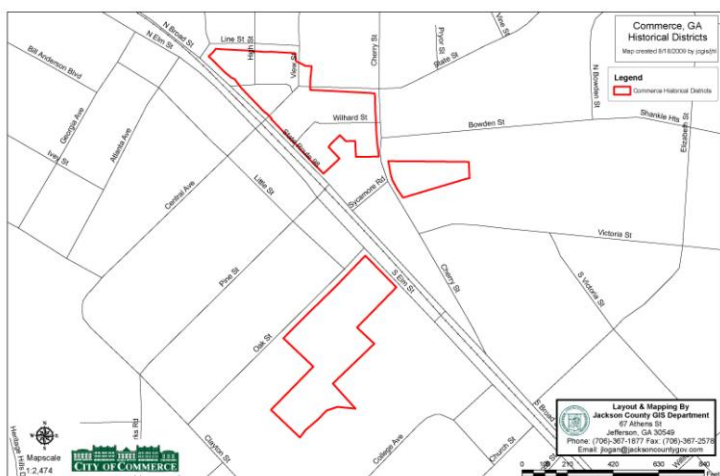
Instead it establishes a deliberation period in place through hearings, which ultimately gives the city time to consider other options to demolition. This ordinance was put in place after loss of a historic resource on the site of the current Walgreens Drug Store. At issue is whether this “light” version of historic preservation will be adequate to protect the abundant historic resources in the city.

### Prospects for Historic Preservation Regulation

There is a core of about 20 preservationists in the city supportive of preservation (including support for establishing a historic preservation commission and adopting ordinances that prevent rather than delay demolition. But, overall, the city may still lack a preservationist ethic. Currently, historic preservation programs are limited to a façade program for commercial building rehabilitation (available online) and certain incentives, rather than a regulatory approach. There are historic design guidelines, but they are voluntary and without “teeth” to enforce. Commerce has been a “Main Street” community since about the mid-1980s. At issue is whether Commerce will take historic preservation to the next level, and establish one or more local historic districts.

### Expansion of National Register Commercial Historic District

There is potential to expand the existing commercial historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places, since it only covers one side of the railroad tracks in downtown. The other side was excluded because of the existence of several “intrusions” but there is potential to include more in the listing, even if it includes intrusions.



**Existing Historic Districts in Commerce**

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **Tree City USA**

Commerce has applied for designation as a Tree City. This will open up funding opportunities for tree programs, including possible tree plantings to screen auto-oriented businesses along SR 98 (Maysville Road). Beautification of this corridor as a major gateway to Commerce is important to the character and well-being of downtown Commerce. Designation as a Tree City USA will mean Commerce should integrate certain activities into its work program in order to maintain that status.

### **Open Space Preservation**

Since only about two percent of the total land area in Commerce is currently devoted to parks, recreation and conservation, there is an opportunity (with so much remaining agricultural, forestry, and vacant land) to formally designate large tracts to ensure the city maintains a certain minimum percentage of open space. Previously, local governments established 20 percent as a goal, as a part of the Georgia Greenspace Program (2000). At issue is how much greenspace is realistic in Commerce, and then, what programs will be used to acquire or encourage preservation of such sites. A combination of regulatory measures and acquisition strategies are likely to be needed. Commerce also should critically reevaluate its open space requirements and determine if they will meet its long-term objectives for green space and open space.

## **LAND USE**

### **SR 98 (Maysville Road) Corridor Aesthetic Enhancement**

The aesthetics of Maysville Road (SR 98) have been discussed elsewhere in this report. Some of this corridor is unincorporated. The plan should call for aesthetic improvement of this corridor. Two mechanisms have been identified: publicly installed landscaping to screen off certain views; and regulations that call for incremental improvement of properties at the time of additional permits granted (signs, building additions, rezoning, etc.).



**Screening along Maysville Road (SR 98)**

### **Commercial Pattern – Nodes and/or Corridors**

The city's character area (future development) map should be finalized after consideration of whether it is desirable to develop in a linear fashion along the major highways in Commerce, or whether a more limited, concentrated, "nodal" commercial development pattern is more desirable. This is an important issue that requires a careful balancing of private property rights with public purposes such as the economy of service provision.



## **Quality Commercial Development Standards**

Commerce's zoning ordinance contains certain standards which are intended to promote quality development and commercial sites that are compatible with the environment and adjacent land uses. However, there is an opportunity to review and potentially strengthen the city's regulations with regard to commercial development, to ensure the best possible site planning principles are followed. Since there are many vacant tracts along U.S. Highway 441 that will convert to commercial development during the planning horizon, it is particularly important for Commerce to put those quality development standards in place before they are likely to be needed, as opposed to trying to apply them retroactively, after some development has already taken place.

## **Amount of Growth Desired (Population Target)**

Some local governments consider whether they want to articulate a "target" population in their comprehensive plans. For instance, there may be a certain population level at which the community ceases to maintain "small town" character. During the participation process, citizens should consider whether they want to articulate expectations for future population levels in the city, but those considerations have to be balanced with a lot of other considerations, such as affordable housing objectives and housing to support development already planned.

## **Transitional Areas**

The map of areas requiring special attention identifies two major areas where transitions from one land use to another (typically residential to commercial) are highly likely. In addition, there are other places where land use transitions may take place. The city's land use policies should establish expectations for what types of land use transitions are appropriate, and the conditions under which they will be permitted.



**Commerce as a number of areas where abrupt transitions occur between commercial areas and residential zones.**

## **Opportunities for Live-Work-Play and Mixed Use Communities**

Commerce's zoning ordinance does not contain a mixed-use zoning district, yet it has some significant opportunities to build live-work-play communities. These are particularly likely along parts of U.S. Highway 441. Strong consideration needs to be given to establishing opportunities to develop large-scale, master planned, mixed use communities that have a balance of job and housing opportunities.

## **Incentives for Residential Infill Development**

As the prior chapter on areas requiring special attention has articulated, there is an opportunity or need to ensure that certain existing, established neighborhoods maintain their stability and



character. With many vacant lots in some of these neighborhoods, there are both opportunities and potential liabilities. New houses on vacant lots in established neighborhoods can help stabilize property values and community cohesion. Such new homebuilding may require special incentives. On the other hand, new development in such existing neighborhoods can be incompatible with existing homes unless clear, advance thinking is given to what dimensional and bulk requirements for new housing should be. Infill development should be explored and addressed much more fully in the community agenda.

### Permitted Uses in Downtown

There is a need to reassess and amend the uses permitted in the downtown, including furniture manufacturing, DUI school, and storefront churches. Some uses permitted now are not conducive to the downtown fabric/environment of main street retail. Revision of the zoning ordinance in this regard needs to be a part of the city's work program.



Some uses in the downtown core do not contribute to retail shopping objectives.  
Photo Credit: W. A. Storing

### Commercial Intrusions and Nonconforming Uses in Neighborhoods

In some cases, there are commercial uses at the fringe of or even within established residential areas. While such uses may be "grandfathered" and will continue for some time, the city should consider the extent to which such incompatible uses can remain in their same condition and whether they will be allowed to expand. Some consideration should be given to requiring aesthetic improvements if such uses are going to continue to operate within residential areas.



Commercial use intruding into primarily residential area

### **Over-subdivision and Lack of Market Need for Areas Designated Residential**

While the number of vacant subdivision lots in Commerce is not nearly as extensive as that found in unincorporated Jackson County, there is clearly an issue of an excess number of lots already subdivided in the city limits. It may be several years before the market will allow these lots to be built upon. At issue is how Commerce ensures the public safety of these areas, so that looting, vandalism, and dumping do not occur. These vacant subdivisions need to be policed, and property maintenance also needs to be ensured. Furthermore, having a surplus of residential lots means that Commerce should be careful in the short term not to draw its character areas so that they have vast surpluses of residential land that has little likelihood of being absorbed during the 20-year planning horizon.



**Dumping at the end of a cul-de-sac of a residential subdivision off Bold Springs Church Road, just outside Commerce, is representative of the types of problems that are being encountered with subdivisions that have no presence of residents.**

### **Anticipating Large Institutional Needs**

As Jackson County grows, because of its readily available sewer service, Commerce is the likely location for any major institutions that will locate in the county in the future. For instance, it is widely anticipated that a hospital campus larger than the BJC medical center will be needed during the planning horizon. Also, some stakeholders in the county would like to attract more educational opportunities, which will need large sites with good access. Furthermore, land use plans usually do not anticipate and reserve large sites for new schools and large churches which outgrow their existing sites and need more room for building and parking expansion. It is therefore advisable that Commerce formally recognize the future needs of larger institutions and plan sites for them. The map of areas requiring special attention does this, but the community agenda will need to take that concept one step further, such as providing institutional campus guidelines and other expectations for how these large institutions will develop. Compatibility with existing development and accessibility/connectivity are paramount considerations in that regard.

### **“Consistency” Requirements**

Some local governments have elected to achieve consistency of their zoning practices with their future land use plans and/or character area maps. For instance, Jackson County does not allow for the filing of zoning changes unless the proposed land use is consistent with the county’s future land use plan map. The merits and potential drawbacks of land use consistency should be considered and debated in the planning process.

### **Code Review and Rewrite**

The city’s zoning and subdivision regulations are probably not modernized enough to accommodate the types of development that will be promoted in the new comprehensive plan. One of the most fundamental implementation steps typically called for in the short-term work

program of a city or county comprehensive plan is the reconsideration and rewriting of land use regulations. Such a code rewrite will take into account a number of other important issues more specifically identified in this narrative.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

### **Equitable Library Funding**

Jackson County presently does not have a library system, and unincorporated areas are reliant upon the municipal provision of libraries. Commerce has the largest library and is planning for its expansion. Commerce should be a vocal participant in discussions at the county level about establishing county libraries that will relieve the stress on municipalities to serve unincorporated residents with library services.



**Even with a proposed 5,000 square foot addition to Commerce's library, it may face added pressure from unincorporated residential growth**

### **Capital Improvement Programming**

Commerce should consider whether it can formally implement a capital improvement program. Without one, decisions about capital facilities funding are made on a year-to-year, ad hoc basis. Commerce should recognize potential funding shortfalls in terms of maintaining existing facilities, and it needs to anticipate major capital improvements to address growth pressures.

### **Water Conservation and Reuse**

It is important that governments take steps to promote water conservation. As population growth continues, there is an increased strain on existing water supplies, so water facility expansion is necessary. Water conservation efforts can minimize the levels of increased expansion by cutting down on the amount of water used per capita. Some consideration should also be given to examining the feasibility of water reuse (gray water) systems, in appropriate parts of Commerce.

### **Long-term Water and Sewer Needs**

More detailed master planning is strongly encouraged, so that Commerce's water and sewer utilities will be sure that they have the appropriate sources of water supply and water and sewer treatment capacities needed to serve the next twenty years of growth.

### **Update of Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

The parks and recreation master plan should be updated during the five-year planning horizon and should include consideration of an indoor swimming pool/facility to be operated by the Recreation Department of the city.



## **New Public Safety Facilities**

As major development comes to the fringes of Commerce, strong consideration must be given to plan in advance for future needs with regard to public safety, i.e., new police and fire station facilities. For instance, it may be desirable to plan for decentralized police annexes within some of the larger developments, when they develop. Furthermore, Commerce may need fire stations in other parts of the city besides the downtown, in order to maintain response times and answer an increased number of call demands, as development becomes more concentrated.

## **City Hall and Administrative Spaces**

Growth and development will place demands on the municipality's administration, and it should critically assess whether its existing administrative facilities (i.e., City Hall) will be adequate during the entire twenty-year planning horizon.



**Commerce City Hall**  
Photo Credit: W. A. Storing

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Need for Sidewalks**

There are insufficient connections via sidewalk between the downtown and historic residential neighborhoods. There are few sidewalks that facilitate walking from neighborhoods to downtown, such as to a restaurant. There is a need to prepare an inventory of sidewalks and plan for pedestrian connections to neighborhoods, and in general to provide much better service for pedestrians.

### **Extension of Streetscape**

Commerce was one of the earliest to do downtown streetscape improvements, using the original ISTEA program which has evolved under different names since then. The plan should call for extension of the streetscape of downtown, as appropriate.



**Attractive streetscapes contribute to the health and viability of the downtown core**  
Photo Credit: W. A. Storing



## **Downtown Parking**

At issue is the extent to which Commerce's DDA provides sufficient and adequate parking. The DDA has prepared a public parking inventory in Commerce, which is divided into four zones. A map of the lots owned by the DDA for parking, along with a numeric inventory (may not be updated for Zone 1) has been provided to the consultant. At times, some of the uses like funeral homes and churches, cause a shortage of prime parking in the downtown. Offices located in the downtown also routinely use the spaces in front of their businesses, thus taking away potentially high turnover parking spaces that could be used by patrons of merchants.

## **Parking Lot Improvements**

A sketch plan produced by Department of Community Affairs (office of downtown development) and the city's engineers indicates a proposed improvement to connect one city parking lot better to downtown retail via a pedestrian plaza; this involves removal of the civic center loading dock. Better lighting, signage and landscaping need to be installed at City/DDA off-street parking lots/locations.



**One of several off-street public parking opportunities in the downtown core.  
Photo Credit: W. A. Storing**

## **Comprehensive Parking Management Plan**

The DDA is calling for a comprehensive parking management plan in its downtown. It has discussed possibilities for installing meters, time limitations and chalking tires, and so forth. Commerce needs to make its off-street parking lots more attractive and safe and functional, with some lighting, better (universally recognized parking directional signs), and landscaping/dress up/ clean up.

## **Railroad Rights of Ways and Crossings**

While freight and passenger railroads do not necessarily require conventional planning by the locality, since they are usually private, they pose a number of public issues of concern. There is, of course, the land-use perspective of planning compatible land uses along railroad tracks due to noise and vibration generated by trains. Equally if not more important are the access implications. There are also beautification and aesthetic considerations.

Commerce has a number of local surface streets that cross railroads at grade. To some extent, it has already considered some of the issues associated with at-grade crossings of railroads and local roads. However, it may behoove the city to consider further the safety aspects of these crossings and opportunities for elimination of scarcely used railroad crossings.

If streets cross railroad tracks at grade, they need to have adequate crossing restrictions (gates), flashing lights, and warning signs. At-grade crossings of railroads should sometimes be eliminated if they pose safety concerns. Railroad crossings also can affect public safety response times by if road access is delayed or constrained by a railroad crossing, when a train is traveling through. Finally, there is potential for cooperative agreements with railroad companies for installing improvements such as additional safety features, pedestrian crossings, and beautification efforts (e.g., planting in the railroad right-of-way). These deserve some consideration in city's Community Agenda.



**At-grade railroad crossing causes delays for through-traffic on U.S. Highway 441**

### **Access Management along Major Roads**

Transportation plans need to establish policies for separating (minimum distances between) street intersections and driveways, principles for lining up driveways on both sides of streets, and placing road median breaks, among others. Because access management relates primarily to safety considerations, it deserves prominent treatment in transportation plans. At issue is the extent to which the city's current regulations provide adequate controls for access points on local and major roads.



**The lack of inter-parcel access between businesses along U.S. Highway 441 can increase highway turning movements.**

### **Narrow or Substandard Roads**

In a few instances, Commerce has some roads that are narrower than current standards would require. At issue is the extent to which such narrow, substandard roads exist and need to be upgraded. As noted immediately below, sometimes narrow roads contribute to the character of a given area and therefore it would not be advisable to widen them. The community agenda should consider this issue further and provide recommendations as to the extent of substandard roads and any needs to upgrade or preserve them.



**Narrow (substandard) street in Commerce**

### **Alternative Street Standards for Areas of Varying Character**

Community building has become more context sensitive over time, and communities have become increasingly critical of wide subdivision street cross-sections that were developed when engineering considerations were dominant. Commerce should consider whether it needs to re-evaluate and change street right-of-way and pavement standards so they are not excessive, or at least provide greater flexibility in New Urbanist developments, conservation subdivisions, and other “context sensitive” places.

### **Improving Transit Service**

Jackson County’s rural transit program provides one of the only means of travel for some people. At issue is the level of commitment Jackson County will provide in the future as these needs grow, and whether it will be sufficient to serve the mobility needs of Commerce’s transit-dependent population.

### **Requirements and Guidelines for Traffic Impact Studies**

Transportation plans and implementing regulations should establish policies for when a traffic impact study is required. At issue is the extent to which Commerce should specify when traffic impact studies are required, and if so, what their contents should be. It is anticipated that Commerce will have several large-scale developments which will warrant review of a traffic study to ensure all transportation-related objectives of the comprehensive plan are met.

## **INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION**

### **Anticipating Future Annexations**

As a city annexes land, its service population (including employees and residents) increases, and there is a change in service provision from the county to the city. The annexation of land can have a remarkable impact on public facility and service provision. Therefore, future annexations can be one of the more important considerations when planning for the long-term future of a municipality. Since future annexations cannot be predicted, it is difficult to plan ahead for them. One method of assisting with that uncertainty is to develop policies or a plan for future municipal expansion; such a plan, if prepared, cannot bring certainty to future population projections but could give the city a much better idea of what its future population, employment, and service needs will be. Therefore, one important issue arising from this analysis is whether Commerce should prepare an annexation plan or provide a future “sphere of influence” within which it is anticipated annexations will occur during the 20-year planning horizon.

### **Water and Sewer Service Areas**

Commerce provides its own water and sewer services, and the county provides those services to selected areas of the county through the Jackson County Water and Sewerage Authority. At issue is the adequacy of existing service area designations. There is a need to comprehensively reassess those service area boundaries, and to clarify the formal boundaries in light of municipal annexations.

### **Other Intergovernmental Issues and Intergovernmental Agreements Generally**

There are a number of issues and opportunities with regard to the provision of community facilities and services that will require discussion with Jackson County, Maysville, and perhaps abutting counties within which Commerce has water and sewer service extensions.

Review of the county's service delivery strategy reveals there are not very many formal agreements with municipalities with regard to certain services. There is an opportunity to formalize many of the service arrangements with formal agreements that will avoid potential conflicts later. The countywide service delivery strategy itself is probably not going to provide sufficient detail to reconcile confusion or conflicts, when they develop. Commerce and Jackson County should be opportunistic in this regard, rather than waiting for a critical impasse or serious issue that forces the parties into a reactive effort.